

## Margaret Grafton

The artist writes:

" I have worked with the tapestry loom for many years and there have found full scope for a creative art form. I have loved the challenges of the grid and the sensuality of wool, yet ensconced in the art/craft opposition, tapestry weaving is known to be soft, sensual, often graphic whereas woven metal accedes to sculptural shape and reflects the movement of light. My present work of woven metal foil, copper or aluminium - and sometimes foam rubber - engages still with the tapestry grid but the medium has an equal role with the weaving technique. I can now play with shape other than the rectangular, and the movement of light on woven metal and its reflective character opposes the light absorbent quality of woollen weaving. What I am doing with metal is a kind of relationship to traditional woven tapestry work. By this I mean that whilst aware of what the woven metal is *not* i.e., soft and sensual. As I weave the metal forms take on their own positivities and sculptural shape (with the glint of metal and the occasional cut finger) rather than soft and folding woollen tapestry. The grid of woven metal belies the concept driven art-work; the rationality emboldened here is that of an ancient and complex skill, a medium of technological sophistication and a labour intensive construction. The aluminium weave retains its glitter through the generations whereas the copper weave with the action of time upon it, will gradually change from a lustre to a crystallised finish - verdigris - green." (M. Grafton, 2004)

Establishing her Darlinghurst studio in 1965, she worked consistently for more than 35 years on commissions and exhibitions, and many of her public works - some 29 works in all - can be seen today in law courts, hospitals, city councils and the NSW Parliament. The National Gallery, State galleries and individuals have also collected her weavings.

From the outset her 'practice' was experimental in design and technique. The 1964 Tocal tapestry commissioned by the architect Philip Cox - who has referred to this work as 'almost a State *Bayeux*' - combines early Egyptian weaving technique with the architectural and modern Protestant iconography. Further exploration into materials led to the use of aluminium foil in combination with traditional wool for the Federal Court tapestries in 1976-77. She returned to the use of metal in early 2000 supplementing other materials of wool, nylons, plastics, copper and, appropriately, the reactive elements of acids, inks and varnishes. Always inquiring and exploring, she scored, etched, sketched and alchemised, always towards the texture and light of surfaces allied with the archaic, the personal, the political and, crucially, the porous divide between these categories.

Whether a wall-sized Federal or State heraldic tapestry or a variegated metal weaving, each strand and strip of her work link not only with the ancient history of tapestry making she thoughtfully and passionately evoked, but also with a radicalness of our time. This is a rare combination: an activist, philosopher and weaver who lived these sometimes conflicting tangents. Whichever way one might determine the constituency, what remains of her work, and on display in these glinting triangles and textured weavings, is the thoughtful and subversive sense of the artist Margaret Grafton.

Daniel Grafton, August 2006