

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN OF CLUJ-NAPOCA

DOCTORAL THESIS

**MONUMENTAL
TEXTILE ARTS
IN SHAPING THE
CONTEMPORARY
ENVIRONMENT**

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**CLUJ-NAPOCA
2013**

ABSTRACT

In the 20th century, exhibition events in the field of tapestry which lead to major changes in the artists' and public's attitude towards the bi-dimensional or three-dimensional textile art object, towards the new form of expression generically called *textile arte* or *fibre arts*. Regarding these changes, Rene Berger raises the question: *Can it be considered tapestry yet?*, saying that "art is increasingly looking to relate to a total social experience whose property is to get rid of classification, in the double sense of "ranking" and "class settlement".¹ Contemporary environment has been continuously changing, continuously adapting itself to the pace of human living conditions. As society evolves, its members are becoming more active and their both material and aesthetic needs, grow in direct proportion to the amount of information that flows between individuals. Architecture, in its traditional form, cannot adapt itself to the immediate social upheavals of the human aesthetic needs. Here comes the need to operate and build in the indoor and outdoor environment with flexible, light materials, that can change / transform a space and destination (relaxation area, study area, industrial area, playground, etc.) in a very short time. In a practical setting contemporary environment as a *mise-en-scene*, temporary "scenography" are created to be used for various purposes as required.

Fabric, natural or synthetic, is one of the favourite materials of modern artists, designers and architects in the configuration / reconfiguration of the environment. Processing techniques of fibre and textile yarn – weaving, weaving, knotting – are increasingly being used for the utility and decorative items that complement the living environment.

All contemporary forms of artistic expression that operate with textile or make use of the traditional techniques of processing yarns have as a starting point one of the most important exhibitions in the particular tapestry and textile arts in general in the twentieth century, the Biennial the Tapestry of Lausanne, an event which has marked for almost half a century the importance of this art not only in art history but also socially, aesthetically, architecturally. Until the twentieth century tapestry workshops had been known, as the term of *tapestry* being often replaced by the workshop manufacturer's name. Behind the tapestry many illustrious names of painting appear (Rubens, Goya, Picasso, etc.), but tapestry had been just an industry making reproductions of works by

¹ Berger, Rene, *Mutația semnelor*, Editura Meridiane, 1978, p. 281

painters, these reproductions being on the border of decorative and utilitarian objects. Since the 20th century the textile artist who is directly involved in the process of artistic creation and transposition has been known. Now the perspective on textile arts changes. Due to the interpretation given by Le Corbusier to tapestry and tapestry art revival by Jean Lurçat by applying scientific rigor in achieving its tapestries inspired by the tradition of the Middle Ages, textile art has got beyond the registry of applied arts.

The doctoral thesis *Monumental Textile Arts In Shaping Contemporary Environment* proposes a theoretical and applied research of contemporary monumental textile and environmental arts and the relationship between them and the architectural character of relational and interactive textile installations and their role in restructuring the environment, studying and evaluating the bibliographic documentation and theoretical research of the transformation and evolution stages of textile arts at ambient monumental tapestry from the second half of the 20th century to the forms of manifestation today.

This study aims to illustrate through examples the evolution of textile arts from the monumental tapestry textile to the environment monumental textile installation and indexing in an accessible scheme of the key milestones for the study of contemporary textile arts. Tapestry in its traditional form is kept as artistic expression, subjects were adapted to contemporary events. In parallel with the tapestry, three-dimensional art forms appear in textile arts and our hypothesis is that ambient contemporary textile arts and monumental textile object have rooted in the monumental nature of tapestry and in its function of architectural element. In order to demonstrate the this hypothesis, in this work, we focused mainly on important moments in the history of tapestry, the exhibition in the industry and the artists who through their work have marked this way. The theoretical and experimental investigation joins the aiming amplification and extension of the results applied in the field of my personal concerns.

The thesis is divided into four chapters during which I illustrated with examples the evolution of contemporary textile arts from monumental tapestry from the mid-twentieth century to the monumental textile object with impact on the contemporary environment.

The first chapter entitled *The Ambient Vocation of Monumental Tapestry and Textile Object*, after a review of the key milestones in the history of tapestry, focuses on the monumental aspect of tapestry art.

The art of tapestry has experienced many transformations and turning points over the centuries, in line with prevailing artistic trends and styles of each era. From the first

manifestations in the consecrated form, that of two-dimensional decorative object made of textile fibres for weaving techniques, and so far, the art of tapestry has swung between the status of first rank art and applied art, being strictly related to the craft of the tissue that often had preceded it.

When it comes to upholstery of the 20th century we cannot speak of an evolution of this art rather than a revolution manifested by a return to the aesthetic principles of medieval tapestry. This revolution, which follows a period of decadence of this art beginning in the Renaissance and lasts until near the end of the 19th century, has begun to unfold in the early 20th century to its middle to take hold with the establishment of new rules and methods of weaving the tapestry designed by Jean Lurçat. Tapestry becomes a mural art again, unhooking from the likeness to the easel painting that it had acquired during its decay.

Lurçat (1892-1966) inaugurates the 20th century the revival of tapestry. Though starting to experiment in 1916, Lurçat's art knows its peak in 1930 when, under the influence of the Gothic tapestry, he formulates the principles which would ensure its place as independent art. No longer an imitation of painting, tapestry exploits new raw textures and vivid colours but in a palette limited to a few colours, a characteristic aspect of medieval tapestries.

Since its apparition, architectural tapestry has been associated with being an active component of the environment to which it belongs. Evolution of tapestry occurred according to the architecture development. Tapestry gradually gained sufficient autonomy was considered to have the value in itself and the power to modify or even to establish an architectural area, being no longer just a decorative object. Since the 20th century tapestry has regained the status of monumental art under the influence of Le Corbusier and has extended its scope of influence on architecture. In the second half of the 1950s Le Corbusier produced an important series of monumental tapestries to control the acoustics in the rooms of the public buildings in Chandigarh². Based on these experiences Le Corbusier will classify tapestries depending on their destination: acoustic tapestries and nomad walls.

The second chapter entitled *Unconventional Language of Contemporary Textile Arts* refers to the influence of new materials and transposition techniques in the reception of textile arts.

² The town of Chandigarh was the first planned town of India and is renowned for its architecture and urban planning.

Since the tapestry revolution in the mid-twentieth century, not only themes modify, technical solutions or the form and shape of the object and purpose upholstery fabric. Now new types of materials appear and are used: conventional integrated textile object composition techniques are subject to operating traditional yarn and new synthetic yarn or materials, whose properties allow artists and designers working with yarn to expand the expression thereof in the outer space. New plants and textile items can be continuously exposed outdoors, being one of the great achievements of contemporary textile art and one of the deciding factors that support the outside expansion beyond applied textile arts. In the 21st century textile materials are among the preference of artists and architects in shaping the environment.

In the field of arts and environmental improvements, the emergence Elastane has allowed artists the approach and implementation of projects on a monumental scale. There were large-scale, permanent or temporary textile plants. They are not only resistant to various external factors that usually attacks the textile fibre (light, heat, moisture, moulds) but there are very soft, facilitating transport from one place to another as well as the installation.

With the advent of computer assisted loom tapestry art goes beyond the obstacle of implementation in hard tissue of photographic images. In the 20th century more and more artists translate their vision into textile environment with Jaquard loom. Technical developments led to the computer assisted Jaquard loom type. In 2011, at the 54th edition of the Venice Biennale it was opened the exhibition entitled *Penelope 's Labour - weaving words and images*, a commemorative exhibition of tapestry art in which there were displayed, along with manually woven antique tapestries, tapestry of contemporary artists woven on computer-assisted Jaquard loom. The exhibition highlighted the artistic practice, weaving, used to achieve tapestry of images and presented as one of the most vital and innovative methods of artistic expression used by contemporary artists.

The art of tapestry and textile arts in general are an area where fundamental reforms are based on the implementation of traditional crafts (knitting, *macrame* technique, *kilim* technique, etc.). This feature has contributed significantly to the transformation of modern and contemporary textile art from applied art into monumental art.

The evolution of the transposition techniques, rediscovering traditional techniques and the use of unconventional materials is illustrated by a presentation of Tapestry

Biennials of Lausanne exhibitions that for nearly half a century have rewritten the history of textile arts and their eligibility criteria.

The Lausanne Biennial exhibition was the first event in the field which allowed the artists to explore new materials and techniques and made visible the transition from the two-dimensional tapestry to three dimensional upholstery fabric or object. The biennial has been a springboard for some of the most talented contemporary artists in the field of textile arts. From Lausanne Biennial participating artists have expressed more freely. They have dropped the cardboard upholstery and have worked freely improvising and experimenting with new materials (sisal, flax, hemp). Works have become more abstract and more landscape importance is given to surfaces. Translation is done by an artist who is directly involved in the technical process of bringing a touch of creativity.

Due to these exhibitions, textile arts from the second half of the 20th century have seen an unprecedented revival not only in terms of recognition and bringing to current techniques and traditional crafts now adapted themes and aesthetic needs. The role of the artist has been well-defined by the active participation in its projects. Textile artist realizes one job, his participation in the creative process is active and direct as in the case of painting or sculpture. Thus his role and of textile arts is well defined in contemporary art. With the winning by the textile arts of this position within the arts, the profession of textile designer appears which refers to ambient arrangements, when designing textile components, utilities or just decorative, of the environment.

Lausanne Biennale requires fabric - textile fibre as one of the most flexible materials of contemporary art. Artists of Lausanne expose the potential of this material that artists of the 21st century use to shape the internal and external environment.

The third chapter, *Relational Vocation of Textile Arts*, approaches the textile art object from the point of view of its interactive applications. Contemporary decorative composition, although the principles of classical composition and proportions, can address issues in an interactive manner because of the new possibilities offered by materials and by implementing current technologies.

Contemporary art is not limited to the creation of the object itself but in terms of offering new ways of articulating the environment, wanted the inclusion of the public in the creative process. Contemporary textile plants express in many cases as interactive assemblies. Nicolas Bourriaud defines interactive contemporary art and its manifestations as a *meeting status* "[...] as opposed to a closed object itself through a style and a signature, the art from today shows that there is only a meeting in the dynamic

relationship that maintains an artistic proposition with other formations, either artistic or of other kind".³ In this case, the artistic creation is addressed to all the senses, which makes a time and space relationship that acquires new meanings and the psychological effect is greatly amplified product. The exhibition space, the environment, become part of the new textile plants. Artistic experience is not purely visual, the audience is integrated directly interacting with this work by interfering in it by their presence. Therefore, the composition of ambient textile aims both to obtain complex psychological effects obtained through visual impact with the object (any object) exposed, and with the public interacts in this unique space frame.

Contemporary textile art occurs more often in indoor and outdoor ambient facilities and refers not only to shape an existing space but also create potential spaces with permanent or temporary character. They often involve the viewer as an active element integrated their structure. The spectator has not only access but also among plant can by its actions modify this space.

Textile art is viewed in the light of the performing arts, contemporary setting often making appeals to scenic textile structures. Subject fabric can define space scenography stage or be the metaphor object. The metaphor object is the bearer of a message that translates visually to the spectator. Contemporary scenography increasingly turns to metaphorical transposition of scenic elements (details of architecture, costume, etc.). Phony scenography artistic object is replaced by the message becomes the bearer of the characters and situations illustrated by piece. In contemporary scenography no longer looking imitation of the original, but the whole ensemble scenery concept illustrates the dramatic concept.

The fabric allows the monumental dimensions of scenery that can be fitted and removed easily, do not require much storage space and allow the most sophisticated forms. Along with the scenery textile object the *scenery character*⁴ is analysed too by the view of the object costume. This type of character, defined by stage costume if sometimes unconventional ornaments appeal to an age or a specific geographic area, not just a character but dynamic element of stage design. The costume as scenographic object supports the play and shapes the character.

³ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Estetica relațională / Postproducție*, Editura Idea, 2007, Cluj-Napoca, p.18

⁴ Moraru, Liliana, *Personajul scenografic*, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006, Cluj-Napoca, p. 31

The last chapter is dedicated to conclusions illustrated by my personal artistic approach to environmental textile arts.

My personal concerns in textile arts have originated in the study of traditional weaving technique on the horizontal loom using yarns and natural fibres (wool, cotton, silk). In my student years I had my first contact with what this technique involves, with its possibilities and limitations. In fact, limitations of the technology have led to a much more creative weaving in terms of nodes and the materials used to reinvent. Soumak node and Turkey node become a means of transforming the woven surface relief. Also the relation with weave, the simplest type of fabric, was approached in a new way, for the same purpose of vibrating surface. The study on the proposed topic for analysis in the thesis entitled *Monumental Textile Arts In Shaping Contemporary Environment* was conducted, along with the theoretical and practical work in the workshop. The interest on the above subject has dated back to my master studies and the works performed during this period represent implementation of the studied examples and of the documentary material that has come to shape the ideas that support the artistic approach.