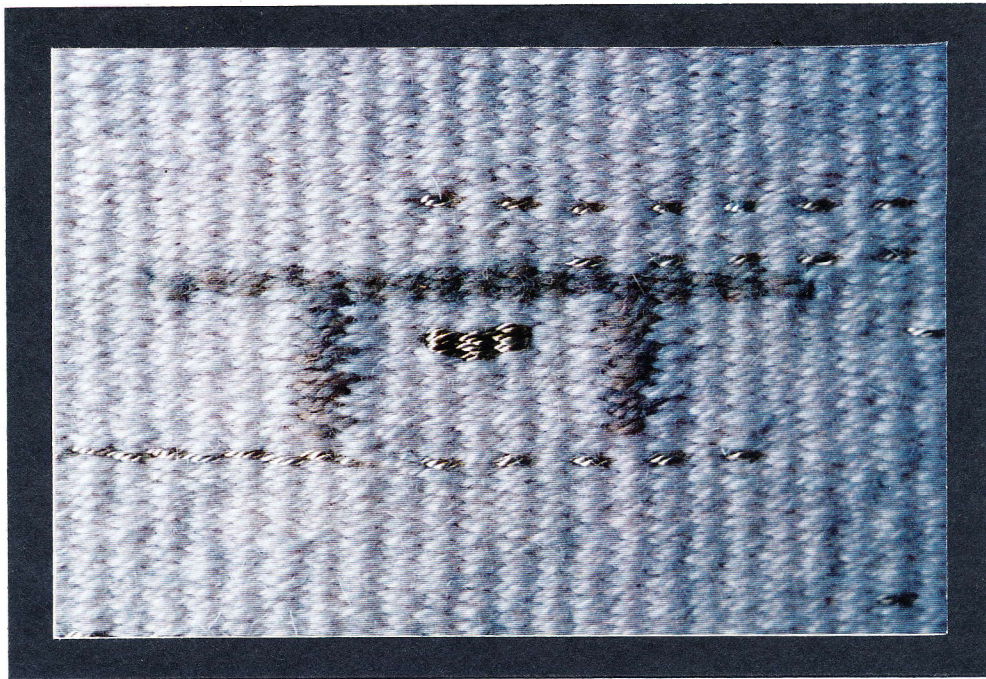


AT WISDOM'S TABLE
THE ART OF SYLVIA JOHNSON EVERETT



Mary Macrina Cowan
Editor

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Any art or writing project comes into fruition with support and contributions of others. Certainly this has been so for *At Wisdom's Table*. This tribute to Sylvia Johnson Everett first came into conception stage in discussion with Elizabeth Nordbeck as how, upon Sylvia's departure as resident artist, we could even begin to express to her our appreciation for all that she had given to the Andover Newton community. Once the idea of a book of theological reflections emerged, the Theology and Arts Committee approved a resident artist's grant project through the Henry Luce Foundation grant which financially supported this project of documenting and reflecting on the work of one of Andover Newton's first resident artist.

I want to gratefully acknowledge each unique reflection of those who have gathered *At Wisdom's Table*. Our seeing, beholding through different eyes enriches us all.

Personally, I want to express my deep appreciation to Bill Everett for his help in conceptualizing this collection and for his ethical deliberation in the covert activity of gathering images and information for this book. A greater appreciation has grown over the years of our friendship for his delight in Sylvia's work and for his pleasure in our desire to honor her and her unique gifts.

Reverence and awe to the creative Spirit who renews all things. Amen.



PREFACE

Truth be told, we who stand in the broad Protestant tradition are more a people of words than we are for movement and the visual arts. Our churches and theological schools reflect that. However, there are clear signs of change. At Andover Newton the Theology and the Arts Program and its several offsprings, the Meetinghouse and the Summer Institute, are ways in which we are literally broadening our vision and our hearing and dancing.

Sylvia Johnson Everett has been one of our resident artists for the past six years. Hanging in various School buildings, including Colby Chapel, are works she created during her time among us. I have failed to hear to hear a single person walking into the a room for the first time where one of her works is displayed who did not comment on how attracted they were to what they were seeing. Sylvia is one of the principal persons who altered our visions on this hill. She did this in her quiet and talented way.

Sylvia has a rich sense of symbols and colors and of our religious traditions. One sees this especially in her tapestries. Those tapestries literally change the space in which they are viewed.

More than the Everetts can know, Sylvia and Bill will be sorely missed when they return to their beloved North Carolina mountains. While among us they have brought much joy and enrichment in so many ways to our common life.

I thank Mary Macrina Cowan for her creative editing of this volume as she has skillfully woven together images and texts for this book.



Benjamin Griffin
President
April 2001

Introduction

This book has been created in celebration of the presence of Sylvia Johnson Everett, at Andover Newton Theological School. As one of the first resident artists, Sylvia worked from 1995 to 2001. The focus of this book is foremost on her works of art created while at Andover Newton and on the influence of her work in the life of the campus community. Secondly, we hope in this tribute to Sylvia to lift up the work and role of the artist in residence in a seminary community, a role that Sylvia has quietly and unassumingly lived into over the past six years.

*As Sylvia and Bill Everett began preparations to return to their mountain home in North Carolina upon Bill's retirement as Professor of Christian Social Ethics, it became clear the importance of documenting the presence of Sylvia's work as it has hung in the buildings of Andover Newton. Some commissioned pieces, *The Good Seed* in Dabney and the *Seasons of Community Life*, tapestries for the Colby Chapel remain.*

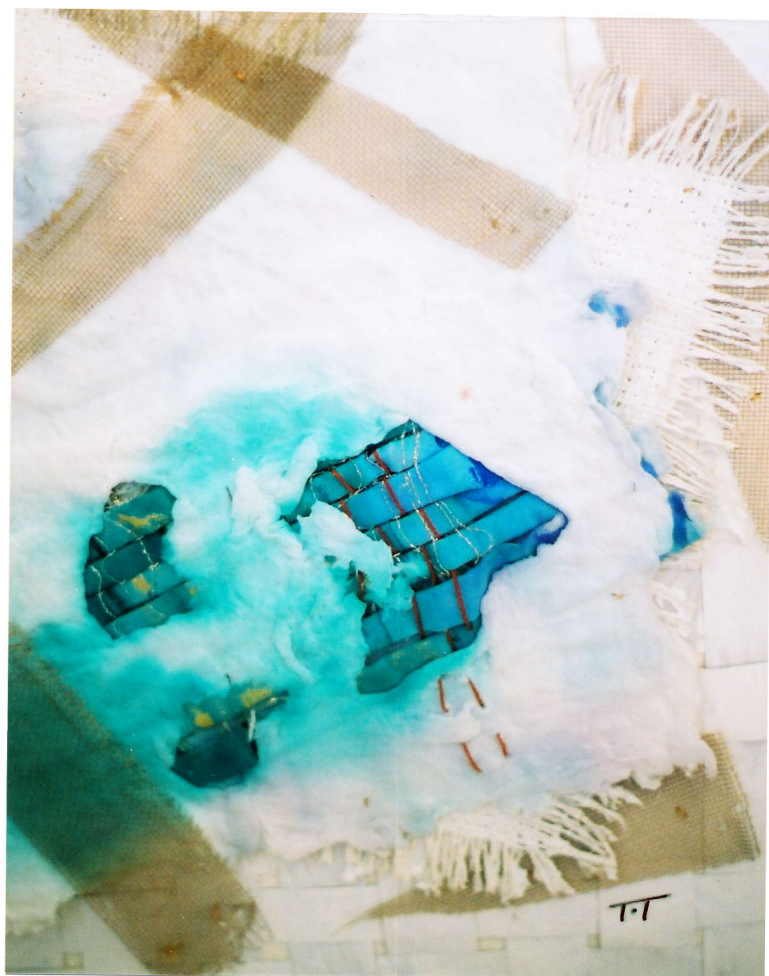
*The *Extraordinary Times* panels on loan to Trask Library and the *Color of the Gospels* on loan in the Peck Conference Room leave us empty spaces as they depart in the possession of their creator.*





Gone from among us are the paper cut hangings, various mosaic musings and chapel installations. Always a gallery within itself, the space created as her studio is empty now. Dismantled are the mini-altar spaces fragrant with burning candle or incense. Sylvia's work on her new creations will be in continued in her studio at Overbrook, her heart's home.

Opened for us as a theological community is the opportunity to consider in new ways what it means to have a theology and arts program that invites artists into its midst. In looking into and through her work and her life with us over these past years we have the opportunity to acknowledge the richness images and color have brought to our corporate life as we worshipped, taught, and studied together.



I believe Sylvia would not want us to rest with the looking and reflecting with her images; she would rather have us go deeper and confront the questions that the simple presence of an artist creating brings to theological education and to the formation of ministers in a Protestant seminary in an age of pluralistic religious communities in a global community. As she and Bill traveled on their various sabbaticals, Sylvia returned with images created by other Christian artists from India, China and South Africa, thus, widening our visual horizons of faith.

She has struggled in her creative journey to be a symbolist and colorist who imaged universal truths that could break open our experience of the holy.



Sylvia described the purpose of her work as an artist is:

to create an alternative and contemporary religious imagery through imaginative, stimulating, and spiritually uplifting art appropriate to the late 20th century. I consider my work to be a way to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings and other emotions, and to be my spiritual vocation. Figures, texts, and ideas from my own and other religious traditions are used as subjects of interpretation as well as reflection on contemporary life, interior landscapes, and the natural environment."

*In Sylvia Everett's studio, **Wisdom's Table**, there has always been a feast of color and variety of images and themes. Various threads and yarns for her weavings, glass of broken bottles or expensive glass mosaic, assorted leaves and wood pieces have been her ingredients.*



*At **Wisdom's Table** is an opportunity to look again and again upon the images of the work of Sylvia Everett. The brief reflections by different members of the Andover Newton community are in themselves windows through which to look anew.*



In the beginning,
women were in charge of the
concrete needs of their families:
-production of new persons
-food production & preparation

and, last but NOT least,
-textile manufacture!



From medieval Jewish manuscript: Eve
spins in Eden while Adam tills the soil

No matter what else
they did, the production of
yarns and weavings became and
remained a staple of women's
contributions to the biblical family



From 15th Century Italian Jewish
manuscript: Woman spinning with
distaff

*They worked in the
Temple in Jerusalem, weaving
hangings for the indigenous Tree-
goddess of ancient Israel, Asherah...*



Mistress of Caprids:
Conoid from Iron Age 1 Taanach
(lineoleum block print, after Keel &
Uehlinger 1998, illus. 154b)

During the Exile in Babylon, they kept their people safe by wearing personal amulets of protection, another example of their connection to the 'wise women' of the ancient tribal period...



The Ishtar Gate, Babylon. Glazed tile.

And in Newton,
their work was continued by
Sylvia Everett---in the
Meetinghouse, in the Chapel, and
in the studios perched high like
Zion atop a building ...



Mitannian Cherub. Cylinder Seal.

Academic Convocation
&
Blessing of
The Meeting House

Wednesday, September 20, 1995

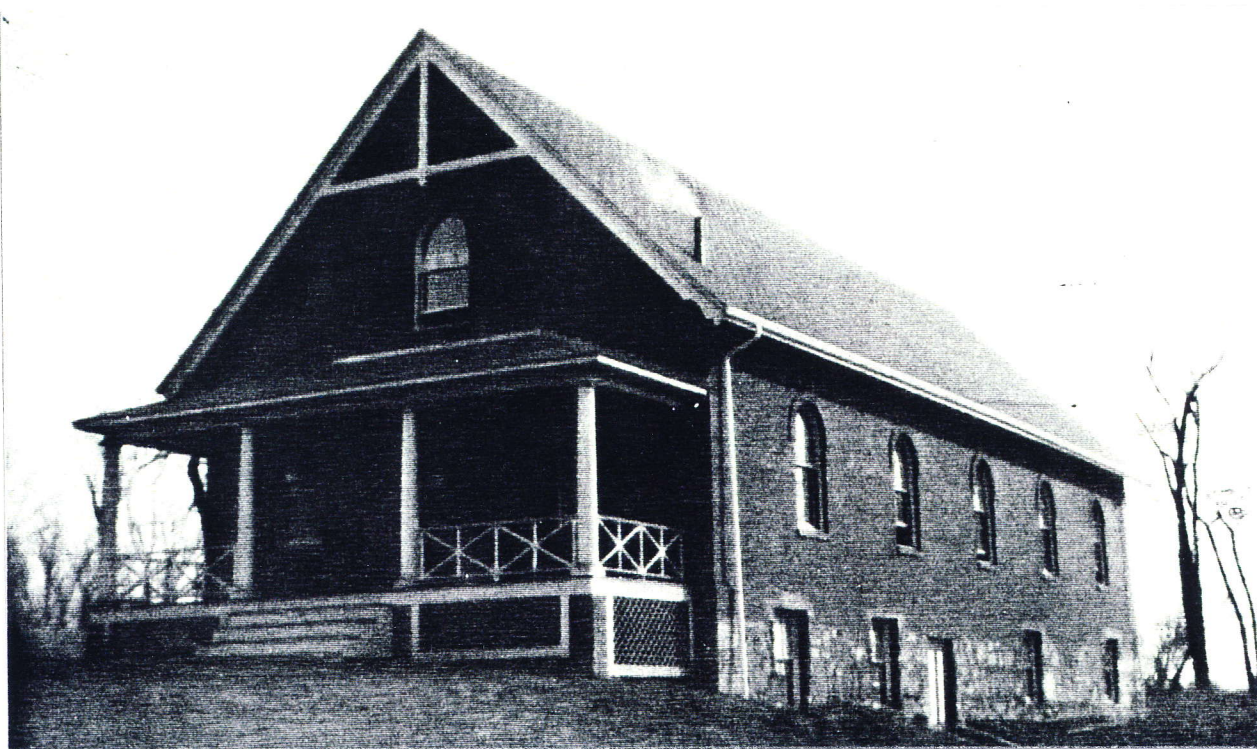


ANDOVER NEWTON
theological school

Creating a Center for Theology & the Arts

In January of 1995 permission was requested from the Board of Trustees to use the Burgess Gymnasium as a gallery and Art Center. The gymnasium was built in 1875 as the seventh building of the Newton campus. It would seem from a quote from the 1903 issue of *The Newtonian*, the building had more than once become a forlorn place.

But what of the present gymnasium? Well, as a man said about his poor, thiftless relative, "Please don't mention the matter." We hope soon to bury the last sad remains. The administration is not proud enough of the present adjunct to even mention it in the Necrology list. However the students are even now so desperately earnest about the matter, that they are trying to galvanize and dress up the corpse, and make themselves believe that the dry bones will live. But it is a hard and mournful task.



Last renovated in 1930, the building had fallen in virtual disuse and serious disrepair. On April 1, 1995 permission was granted by the Trustees. A quote from Sylvia Everett's notebook:

With \$2500 given by family and friends, a group of volunteers including students, faculty, spouses and children, staff and even acting President, Ralph Elliot, cleaning, painting, and repairs began.

Volunteers at Work or Play?

The Bill and Sylvia Everett team at work



"The Meeting House is currently under renovation by a group of volunteers from the Andover Newton community led by Bill and Everett, in partnership with the Theology and the Arts Committee of the School. It is to become The Center for Theology and Arts; but more broadly, it is meant to be a space open to all of the community who wish to encounter the creative spirit in the arts and in each other---a house of true meeting and, we hope, of God's blessing for all."
From the Program of Blessing of the Meeting House



Reflections on Sylvia Everett

from the Meetinghouse by William S. Patten

During my two years as administrator, Sylvia was helpful and encouraging without being intrusive. I felt almost guilty arriving in a building, The Meetinghouse, which she and her husband, Bill, had already started to rescue; and then, as we moved into the next stage of renovations, evicting her from the loft space which had become her studio space for four years. Yet she graciously accepted the changes and supported the ongoing efforts to improve the building.

When I think of Sylvia Everett in the context of Andover Newton Theological School, I think of the handsome granite blocks that she discovered in the undergrowth of the soon-to-be developed woods of this campus. Suspecting that they might have been part of the foundation of an outdoor chapel of some kind, we used these blocks to conceptualize an outdoor sculpture, or "Prayer Stone" center that would embody in clear and enduring visual terms the school's interest in the integration of art and theology.



Looking from the Meetinghouse Loft toward Sturtevant 3rd floor studio

As a full time resident artist, Sylvia contributed a unique perspective, catching aspects of life in and around the Boston area which are often missed by others. Her noticing the potential of the granite blocks is precisely the kind of creative insight with which I associate Sylvia. This breath of vision was both refreshing and inspiring.

As both of us are leaving Andover Newton at about the same time, I am pleased that these granite blocks--though not yet used as we imagined in an aesthetic sense--nevertheless have been placed in such a way as to protect the new landscaping around the historic building which she helped so much to resurrect. Out of this building she also produced the art which can be seen around campus enlivening various interiors of the campus. As she put herself in her final report on the Chapel Art Project, by her work she succeeded in "enhancing the educational experience of both the creative process and the use of art in worship. Both she and her work will be missed.

More Renovations....

The renovations to make the Meetinghouse handicapped accessible were completed in the fall of 2000. The shed in the rear of the building provides for storage of chairs, tables, and pedestals allowing the floor of the gallery area to be more open. Note in the photograph below the flag hanging from the porch, Sylvia's contribution to providing a welcoming space. While any change means loss of some type, these renovations were in keeping with the original blessing, to be a space open to all of the community.



The Good Seed:

A Tapestry by Sylvia Everett



The Good Seed tapestry expresses the life and potential growth inherent in a seed. Here the seed can be viewed as the interior of a bulb, which contains the flower ready to burst forth full life. Recalling Matthew's parable of the good seed, this image carries multiple layers of meaning and possibility for both the planting and nurturing of good spiritual seed in the soil of theological education.

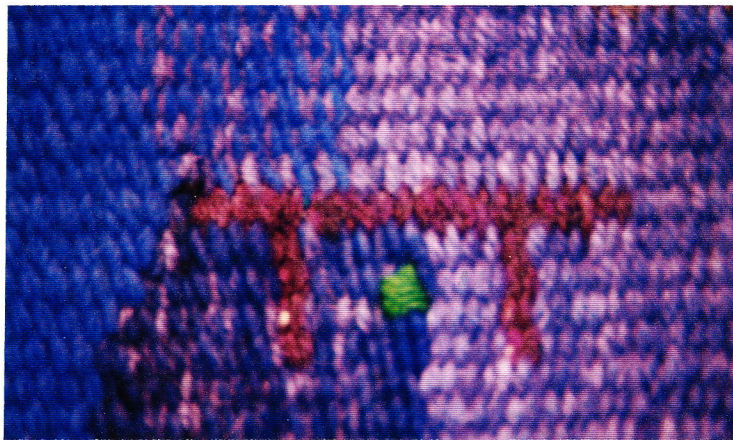
Sylvia Everett

**The Good Seed*, which hangs in the lobby of Dabney Hall, was commissioned in 1996 at the time of the installation of Benjamin Griffin as President of Andover Newton

Reflections of Benjamin Griffin

The Good Seed is an excellent symbol of what a seminary strives to be. The very word *seminary* means seedbed. In these usually small and fragile institutions we seek to nourish and cultivate those reflective insights, creative arts, and practical skills for those who will go forth from this seedbed to serve church and society. In a more profound sense, I hope that Andover Newton nurtures in all of us, but especially our students, habits which deepen one's life with God.

First time visitors to Dabney Hall, where I work, sometimes mistake the symbol of **The Good Seed** for the fire of Pentecost. Indeed, the vivid colors of the threads and the nature of the weavings might give an appearance of dancing flames. I do hope that the Spirit moves in this place with power and hope, but I always try to tell visitors that this is **The Good Seed**. And, then, I tell them about the word seminary and how in our central administration building we have on the lobby walls both this tapestry and the School's mission statement: two symbols of what we are about. Our mission is to be a seedbed for the church.

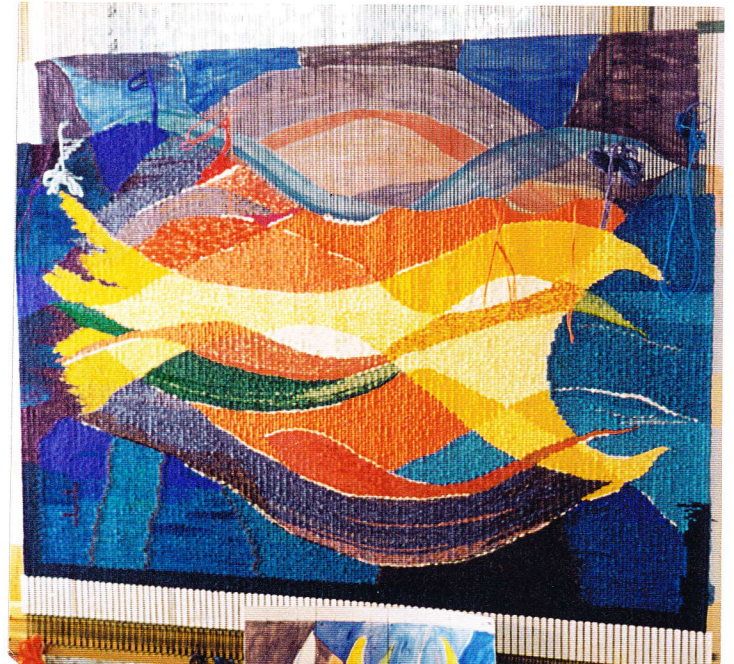


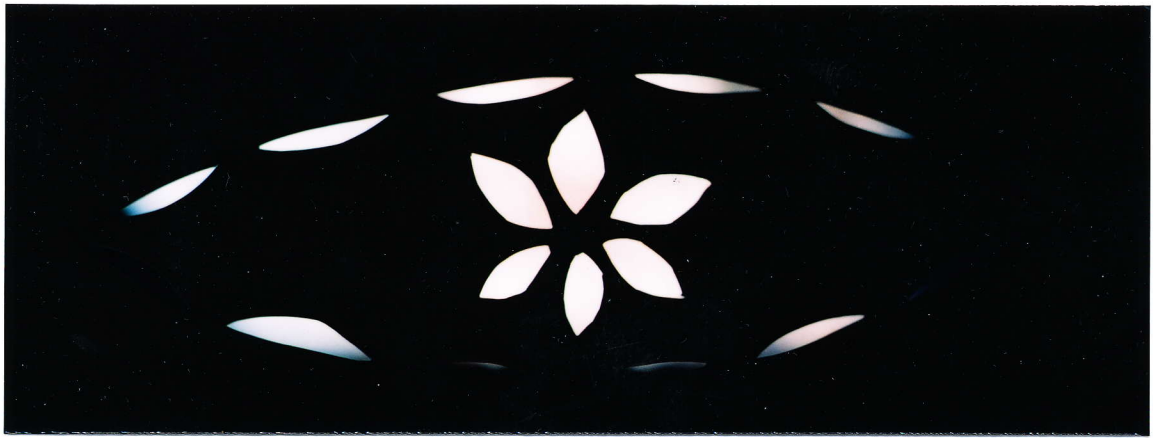
The good Seed is also a powerful image not only for our students' potential growth, but also for the potential of Andover Newton itself. As we come soon to the beginning of our third century, I pray that a new flowering will burst forth for the School.

The Good Seed

Because there is a personal association for me with the tapestry, **The Good Seed** remains a symbol of my own beginning days as President and the ongoing hope I have for my work in this office. It reminds, to paraphrase Jesse Jackson, God is not finished with me or Andover Newton.

Benjamin Griffin





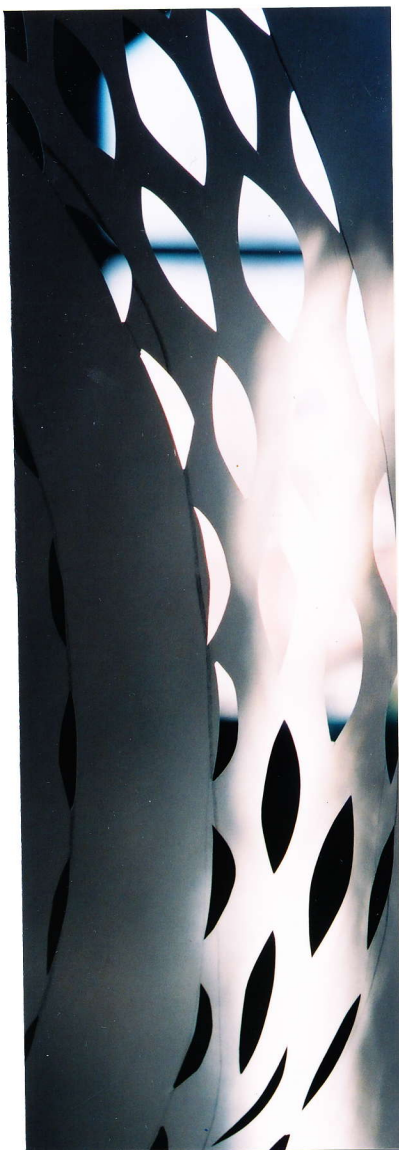
Sylvia Everett's Paper Cut Screen

Priscilla Bizer



Emboldened by an urge to explore and reacquaint myself with a campus left behind more than a quarter century before, I mounted the steps to the Meetinghouse on a cool gray October afternoon. The light from the windows beckoned me inside. The open expanse, the cool whiteness of walls and the warm wood of the floors radiated a soothing quietness. I tiptoed in for fear of somehow disturbing the sacred space.

But I had come in search of Sylvia Everett and I turned to the balcony to inquire, "Sylvia?" Her response came from behind a white paper screen, intricately cut into elaborate designs. Having a fondness for the colorful Chinese paper cuts, I marveled and admired this simple medium transformed into a work of art.



Now, more than two years later, with Sylvia's studio moved to another location, her then current project completed and gifted to the school, followed by other uniquely beautiful and expressive works, I reflect on how that first viewing of her work in white paper design indicated for me the artist behind that screen.

Plain white paper made beautiful with snips and cuts from scissors. As an artist, Sylvia takes the familiar and weaves it, cuts it, shapes it, colors it into something arresting to the eye, mind, and heart. she expresses the experiences of life into a medium which helps us to ponder and reflect on those experiences with new eyes. loving the brightly colored Chinese paper cuts, I saw Sylvia's paper white screen as beautiful in its intricate simplicity and utility.

The screen served its purpose well, providing a shielding from the activity on the main floor and yet permitting her to be aware of that activity while not being consumed in it. Its designs allowed light, energy and a sense of presence to permeate through it, drawing the observer into an awareness of the something or someone behind that screen engaging in the creativity and interactions of life itself.



One Is Invited...



*Glimpses of
Ourselves
Our souls
the Sacred*

What I first experienced as I viewed Sylvia's paper screen has born itself out time and again as I have looked at Sylvia's tapestries, weavings, banners, and arrangements. One not only looks "at" Sylvia's art, one is invited, even led to look "through" it, to be drawn into the work through layers of awareness, glimpses of our selves and our souls to a point of the sacred itself.

Wisdom's Table

The Spiritual Imprint of the Artist

*Reflections from fellow resident artist
Mary Macrina Cowan*

Covenant

We are called to sacralize our spaces into the fullness of life with which we are gifted daily. How blessed it would be, then, to have the talent to be professionally a theological shaper of beauty. But what a terrifying responsibility that would be, for what one designs...has enormous power to nurture or wound the human soul, to deaden or render alive the human spirit in all its doing and relating and being.

*(from "The Shaping of Space as Beauty" in *A Table in the Desert: Making Space Holy* by W. Paul Jones, 2001)*

At Andover Newton a resident artist is provided a space in which she/he can work. In return, the resident artist lives into her particular and unique vision of being an artist in the midst of this particular theological school.

Sylvia's understanding of her covenant entails, in part, that the artist creates her own unique spiritual imprint upon the space. That unique imprint may or may not be what the community imaged in their entering the covenant between institution and visionary. Indeed, perhaps an artist's spiritual imprint cannot be understood until experienced or then, perhaps, until she has left.



The Meetinghouse Encounter

Beauty has to do with the whole disposition...beauty is an intrinsic quality for which our sense must be formed if we are to participated deeply.

W. Paul Jones, 2001

"Before they could change their mind, I wanted to be in there cleaning." For many of the Andover Newton community the Meetinghouse will always be associated with Sylvia Everett. Her stories of cleaning, replacing, and glazing windows only touched the surface of the physical labor of reclaiming a closed-up old building for conversion into a center for theology and the arts. My first real encounter with Sylvia was in 1997 in the context of our preparing the basement of the Meetinghouse for studio space. The basement had become storage for everything from old paint, office machines to dishes and cafeteria equipment. With the Everett team's help over many weeks of removal, cleaning, and painting, the space became my studio; but of far greater importance was the beginning of a mentoring relationship.



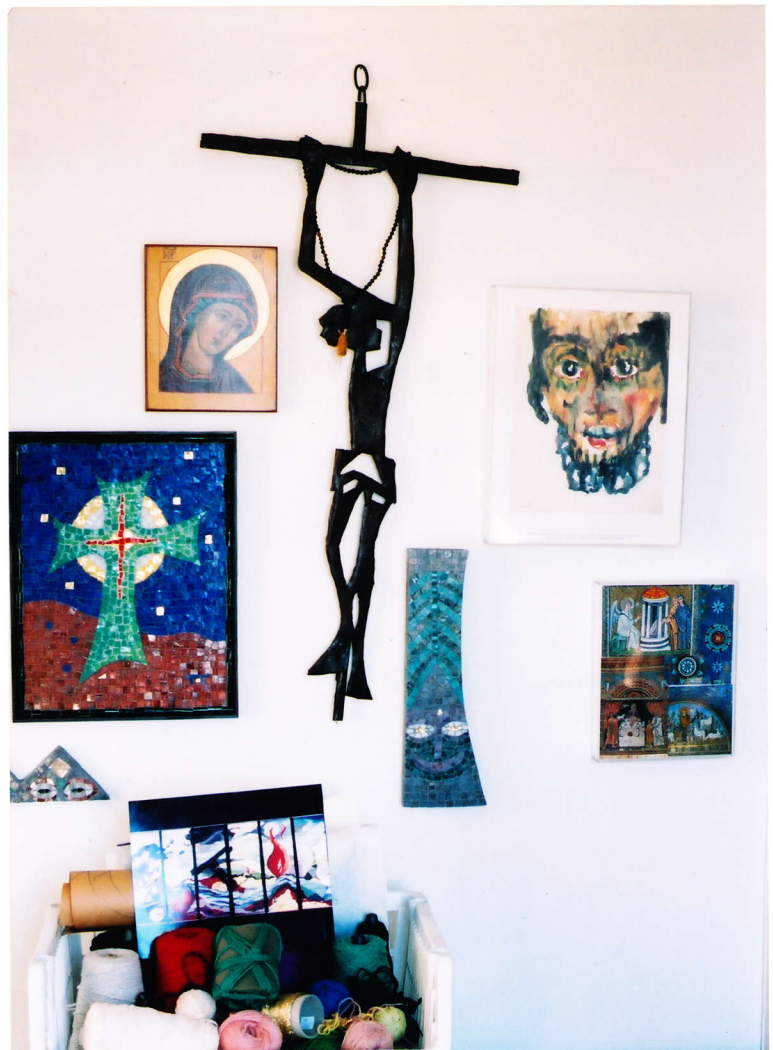
By the summer of 1999, the entire basement space was finished. Plans for greater renovation of the basement studios were approved in April 2001.

The Artist's Studio

*How is a sacred place made?
And how is a place made sacred?*

Sylvia's studio in the loft overlooking the Meetinghouse gallery space provided a sense of aliveness and energy inherent in a person being at work in her spiritual vocation. The reclaiming, the converting and maintaining of a space as studio and gallery space was of ongoing attention and care that arose from her inner vision as much as the vision of a Center of theology and The Arts. Truth be known, faithfulness to such vision will inevitably give rise to tensions and conflict.

The artist must live into the space and create from the space. The significance of the spiritual imprint is most glimpsed in the experience of entering the studio space and in the experience of giving up of one's studio. Companioning with Sylvia over these past four years, I have been moved by the depths of her imprint. It has been in her studio that I have gone for renewal and nourishment of my senses and my soul. I have feasted at Wisdom's Table in many different ways, sometimes through small talk, other times a design question, and times when she wasn't there, just beholding a place made sacred was enough.

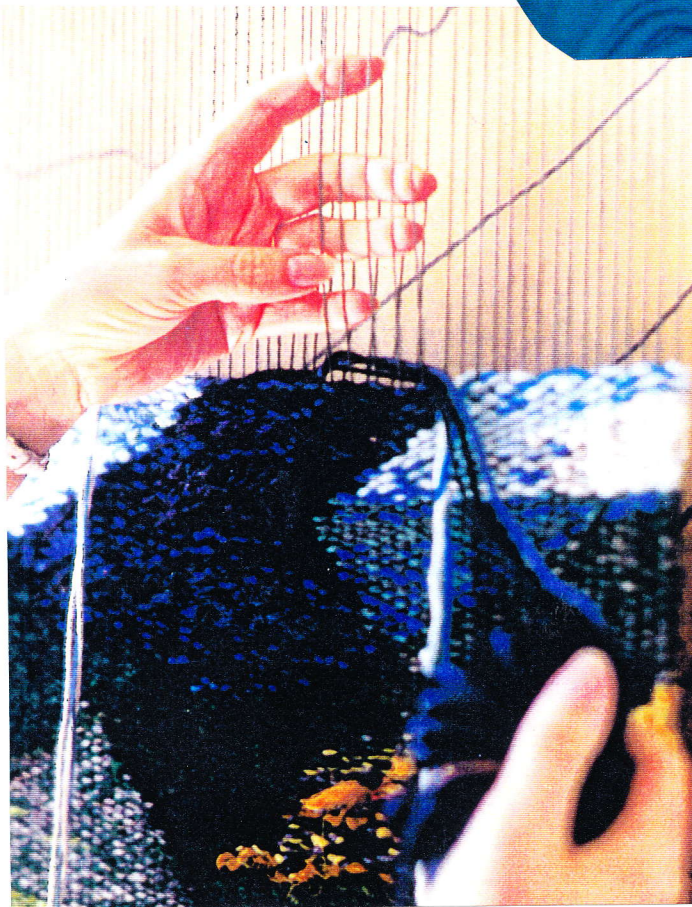


Ways of understanding the spiritual imprint.....

I have found in the book, *Art & Soul: Reflections on an Artistic Psychology*, (Moon, 1997), reflections on his experiences in his studio that have helped formed my own understanding of the artist's imprint. These passages give a sense of my experience of Sylvia and her imprint.

As an artist I view the work I do as a sacred pilgrimage. My mode of transportation is the doing of artistic work. My primary mode of communication is the sharing of the images that I create.

In the sanctuary of my studio, soul is made in the forms of imaged confessions, thanksgivings, and praises. It is a sacred thing to be an artist, for the doing of art opens one to the mystery that is within ourselves and others. Making art is making soul.



The mystery of the creative interaction between the artist, imagination and the world is that this is an act of love that is neither earned nor imposed. One may think of creation and making as acts of grace. They cannot be forced and they are not deserved. They simply happen...the relationship between artist, imagination and the world is utterly tied to the presence of discipline, concentration, patience, mastery and faith...By this I mean faith in the goodness of life, the arts, of others.

The Artist takes images from within and shares them.

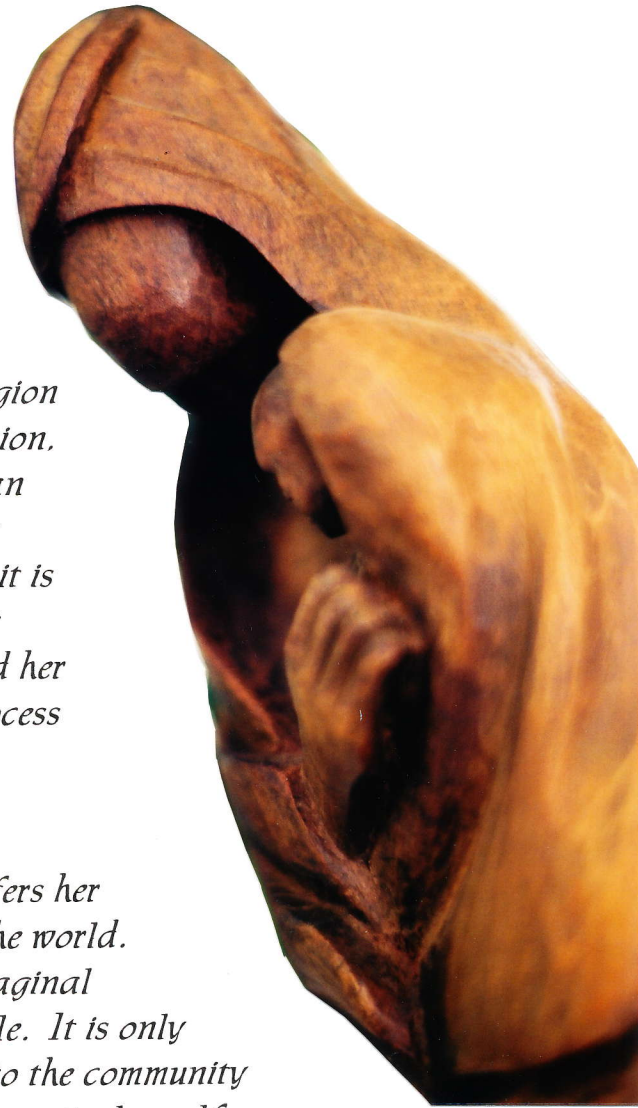
In Sylvia's studio there has always been an altar space with candle and usually one or more images of the feminine from various cultures and traditions. A simple wood carving from Haiti on Sylvia altar serves for me as an icon of Sylvia at work as artist. The words are again from Moon's book, *Art and Soul*.

Meaning can be found only in the context of relationship. The self must be transcended for purpose to be present. The creative process is best experienced in the territory of relationship.

Art is inspired in the region of interpersonal connection, which is the shared human experience. Whether by praise or condemnation it is the community that must respond to the artist and her work in order for the process to be complete.

Through the work the artist offers her views, her unique response to the world. The community receives the imaginal offspring of the artist's struggle. It is only in the context of relationship to the community that the artist establishes her particular self. The other comprehends the uniqueness of the artist.

The artist creates, the community responds, the artist makes again and the community attends, and on and on the creative relating circle spins.





*By making, the artist
takes images from
within and shares
them in the world.
It is an act of
acknowledgment of
the other beyond the
boundaries of the self.
The other is the beholder,
the community.*

*There are few things
more painful to the
soul than loneliness.*



"i AM doing a new thing"



*Sylvia Johnson Everett
Hebrew College & Andover Newton Exhibit of
"Community and Covenant"
Spring 1998*

"i AM doing a new thing"

*Sylvia Johnson Everett
"Community and Covenant"*

This piece was inspired by Isaiah 43:19: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?" This quotation relates to this work on different levels of meaning. First, we hope for a new level of understanding and sense of community between our two sister religious traditions. Secondly, it is an experimental piece for me as an artist, both in subject matter and medium.

I have depicted the interrelationship between Judaism and Christianity by having some of the same design elements and colors continue across the division between the mosaic and woven sections. I have used vitreous glass mosaic to represent Judaism, the more ancient tradition, and tapestry weaving to represent Christianity that grew out of Judaism. The piece as a whole represents the hope for God's continued work to bring about a renewed world. I have reversed the capitalization of the title to suggest the I AM reference to God (Exodus 3:14) and also, by using a lower case "I", to refer to me as artist through whom the spirit of the Holy might work in the creative process.

I am doing a new thing...

In getting to know Sylvia's work one must look and look again at one piece and then another. One can begin to see the pattern of symbols woven through the many pieces, the working and reworking for new insights, fresh nourishment.

*In having this opportunity of being immersed in the imagery and reflections, that is being *At Wisdom's Table*, I am humbled, as an artist and as one who looks, in seeing how much of the richness I have missed in Sylvia's work. In *A Theological Approach to Art*, Roger Hazelton describes, I think, the essence of this encounter.*

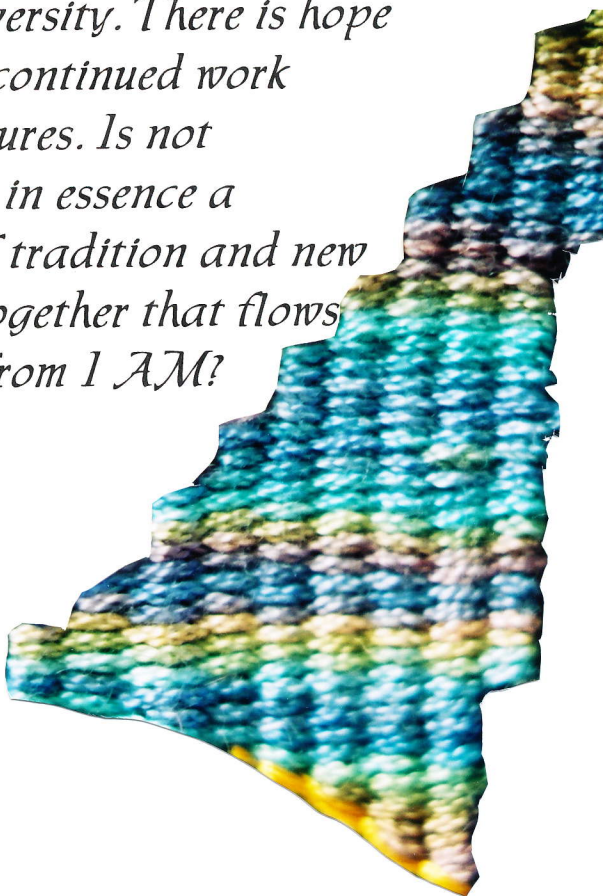
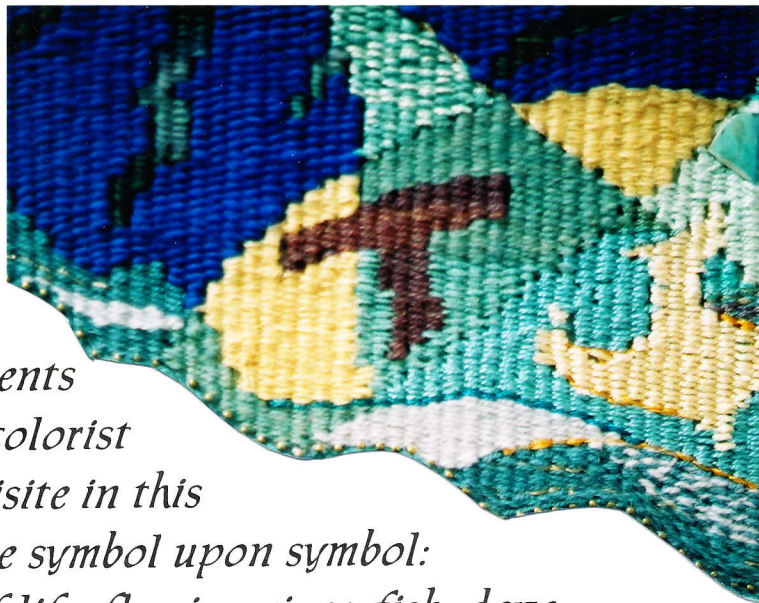
"Attention is the first requirement, naturally, this requirement is as difficult as it is self-evident. By attention is meant listening until we really hear, looking until we really see....letting the artwork grow upon us, move toward us out of its own depth. If there is to be any real conveying of meaning in such experiences, however, the aperture of our sensibilities must be held open long enough for genuine exposure to take place."

"Attentiveness on our part is the price of admission to realizing aesthetic truth."



Now it springs forth. Do you not see it?

Each time I have looked at this creation of Sylvia, I am pulled more deeply into the elements of the work. Truly, her work as colorist and symbolist is at it most exquisite in this tapestry/mosaic. Do you not see symbol upon symbol: tau cross, menorah, altar, tree of life, flowing river, fish, dove, rainbow like colors. It is a complex interrelationship of traditions, yet there is an unity in the diversity. There is hope in color and form reflecting God's continued work in creation and in God's creatures. Is not covenant and community in essence a holding the tension of tradition and new ways of being together that flows from I AM?



EXTRAORDINARY TIME

1995

Sylvia Johnson Everett

These six panels set forth the liturgical seasons interwoven by themes from the natural and mythological year. Each of the first five panels represents a liturgical season by the use of color, objects or symbols particularly associated with it. Reading from left to right they are Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. The sixth panel represents the Future, a time of opening up the cycle to renewal and new possibilities. Horizontally, suggestions a natural landscape and river continue across the panels. The mythological year is portrayed by the positions of the sun, moving into various relationships with the landscape and seasons.

The entire piece constitutes a continuous unfolding of spirit-filled presence in creation. Always there is an anticipation of what is to come and an echo of things past. For example, black dominates the Lent panel, but has its beginnings in Christmas and trails on in a diminished way through Easter and Pentecost. The flame of the Advent candle becomes full-blown in the flame of Pentecost, which in turns is transformed into the green tree of the Future.

My original conception of this work was that the Advent panel would be hung during Advent, the Christmas panel added at Christmas, and the other pieces in turn throughout the year until the full year brought the piece to completion.

Each panel is hand woven in a traditional tapestry technique on a large frame loom. It is predominantly made of wool with accents of silk, cotton, rayon and glass, copper wire and coconut fibre.

Extraordinary Time

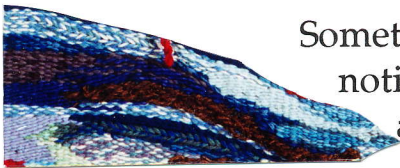
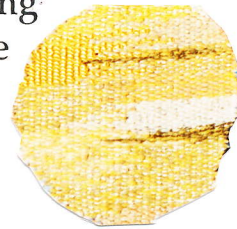


The six panel tapestry as hung in the front wall of Franklin Trask Library at Andover Newton.

Reflection on Extraordinary Time. *A Tapestry by Sylvia Everett*

Sharon Taylor

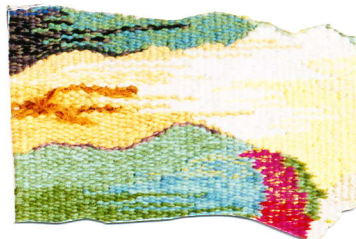
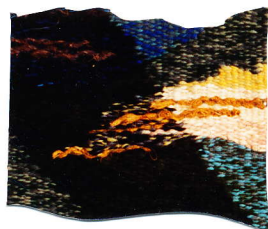
I have been noticing a lot of cracks lately. They are all around me. The hairline cracks in my fine china plates, the long meandering crack in my plaster wall, the cracks in the neighborhood sidewalks--those fissures that appear sometimes for no discernible reason.



Sometimes the cracks are more noticeable like the jagged edges of the asphalt after the thaw---the one you trip over and skin your elbow or break your hip. Sometimes a crack is so big that you cannot ignore it. The Grand Canyon is like that. You can't help but to focus on it. It is a chasm that grabs our attention. We stand at the edge and we try to look deeply into the mystery of it all---to figure out where it came from and what it means.

Good art is like the Grand Canyon. By this I do not necessarily mean that the art itself is so stupendously beautiful that we grasp at its wonder as we do at the sunrise over the canyon rim. But good art is a crack, a chasm, into our everyday existence. It is a crack so wide and deep that we are stopped in our tracks. We are awed. We can't go any further. We have to step back and look hard and figure out what this thing is and what it means for us.

Good art is a chasm into our everyday existence



Beauty and Mystery

Extraordinary Time is a grand Canyon kind of art. It grasp our attention both for its beauty and its mystery. It makes us focus on another kind of chasm---a chasm in history when time and space are opened up before us. Patterned on the liturgical year, the first five panels show us those times when God stepped into our world, loving, claiming and redeeming it, those times when ordinary is set aside and the extraordinary takes center stage. The final panel sketches for us the possibilities of the future with all its potential for renewal. The eye is initially caught up in the colors and swirls and textures of the tapestries. They weave a tale of beauty and drama, of creation and death, of darkness and light--at once subtle and intricate. Moving from Advent to Pentecost, the panels show the dynamism of divine intervention in a glorious sweep through our time.

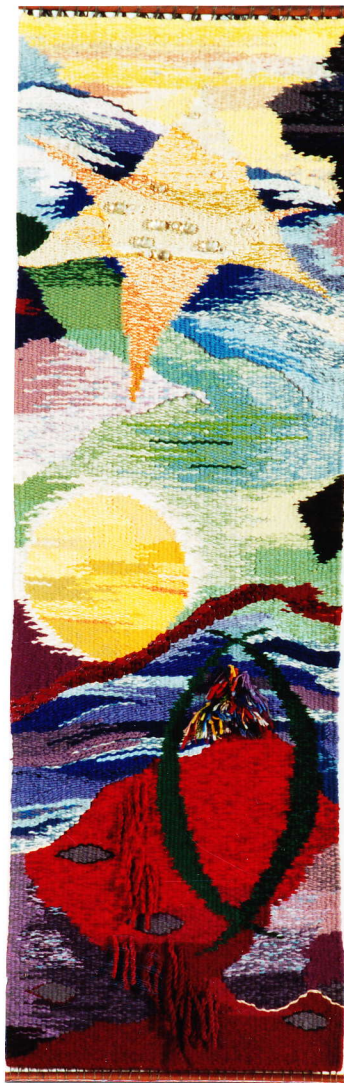


Extraordinary Time has been displayed on the front wall of the library--the most dramatically visible and public space in the building. Its physical setting is perfect to my mind. It gives life and color and character to a somewhat austere environment. But its value is something more than an aesthetic enhancement of a physical space. The library is a practical place, a place where work is done, questions are answered, papers are written, texts are studied. It is a place where it is easy to concentrate on the here and now, and what needs to be done before the next class convenes or before the next Sunday rolls around and there is a sermon to be written. I often see students sitting at the table beneath the tapestries. And every now and then they look up from their reading and gaze ahead. I hope that they are absorbing the message of this art.

This tapestry calls us out of our ordinary pursuits

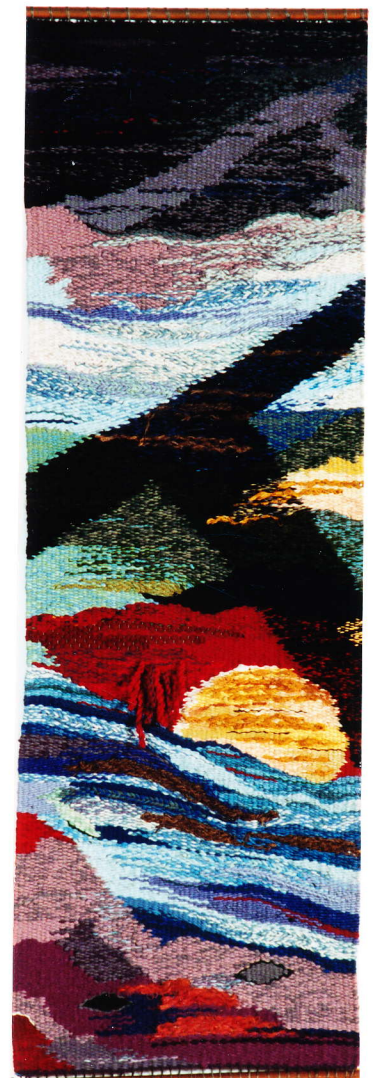


*To sometimes set aside our doing
and contemplate our being.*

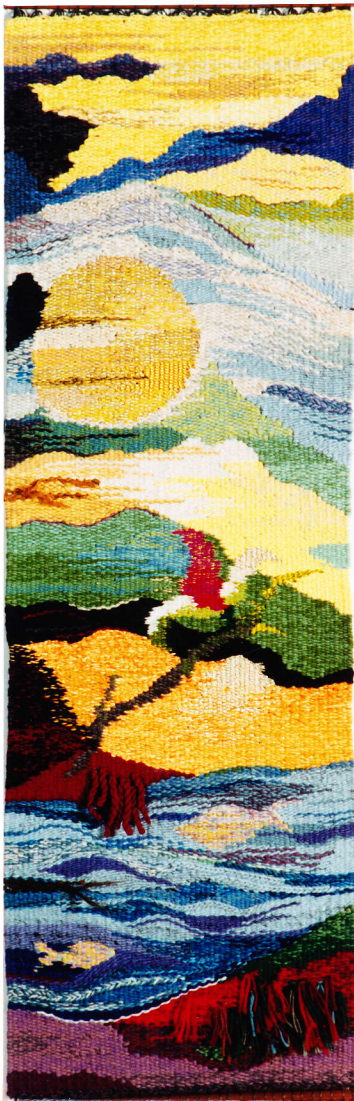


*To remember once again
the God who enters our
history, who sets aside
divine power to take on
the form of a servant.*

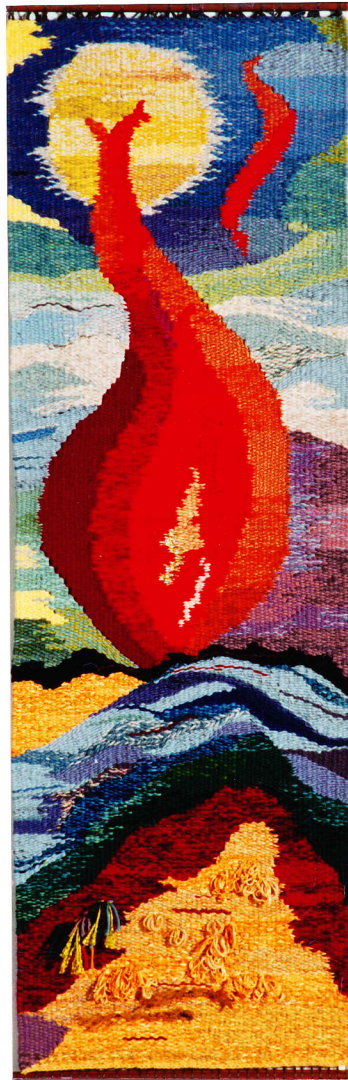
*Who enters human time and a concrete place
to bring a message of reconciliation and to
make a way for rebellious creatures to come home.*



to wonder about the extraordinary.



A God who empowers and renews us.



*To remember once again the
cataclysmic fissures that
occur when God steps into
our mundane reality.*



*To ponder what it would mean for us to step
out of ordinary existence and live in God's
extraordinary time.*

A Meditation on the Cross in Extraordinary Time

An Voice from the Ecology Task Force

"The entire piece constitutes a continuous unfolding of spirit-filled presence in creation.."

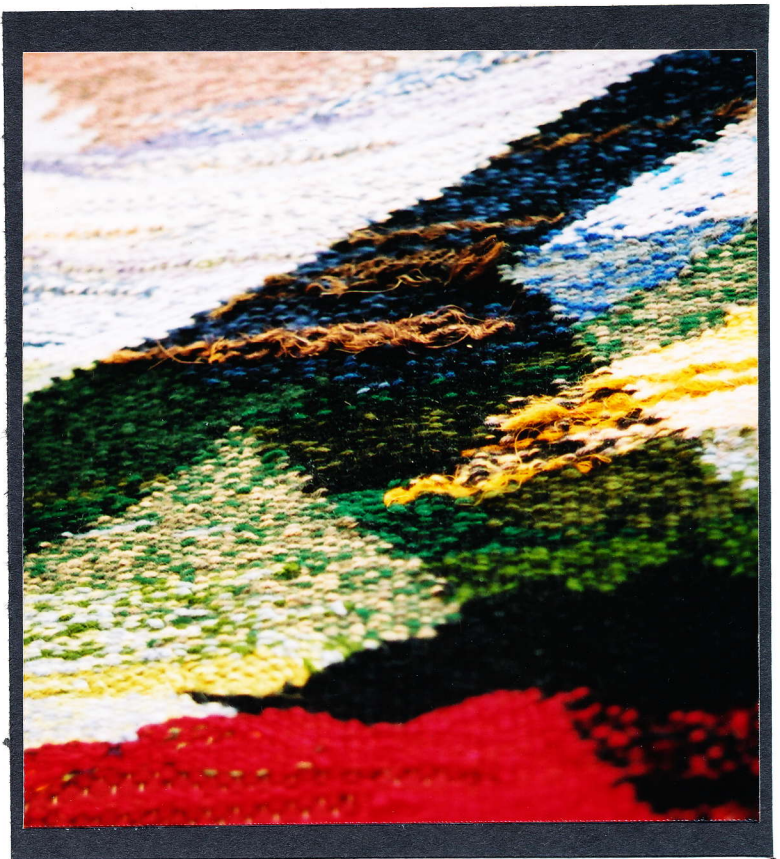
Sylvia J. Everett

When seen at a distance the Lenten panel is, indeed, dark and the cross appears black and heavy in the set of *Extraordinary Time*. It was not until I came close that the black cross revealed the work of Sylvia's color symbolism. There are greens, blues, red, brown and gold woven with and into the black. Penetrating into this panel from the Christmas are flesh tones whirling above the cross.

Rather than the body of Jesus on this cross, we see the Body of the Cosmic Christ in blues of waters polluted, green of vegetation poisoned with toxic wastes, golden sunlight damaged by holes in the ozone, browns of deforested timberlands, and the red blood of extinct animal species.

In light of this cross, what stewardship does Christ call us to as he says, "Pick up your cross and follow me" ?

"Always there is an anticipation of what is to come and an echo of things past."



COLORS OF THE GOSPELS



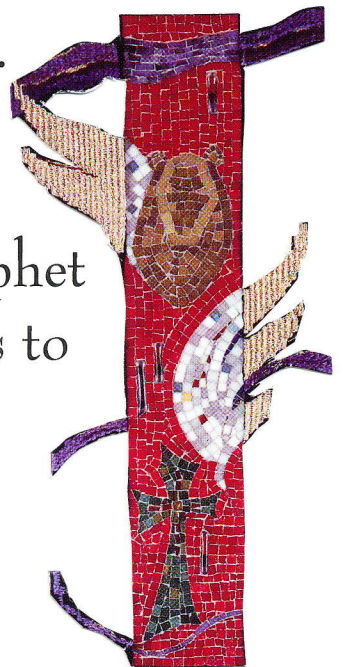
Tapestry and Mosaic hung in Peck Conference Room

COLORS OF THE GOSPELS

Reflections of Seminarian Susanne Billeter

Four gospels. Four witness.
Four perspectives.
Well, five, if you count Sylvia's.
Each rendition of the gospel story is
different, depending on who is telling it.
That's the way it is with the
Artist as Prophet.

As a faithful messenger, the Artist-Prophet
tells and retells the familiar stories so as to
make them new and fresh in the
contemporary context.



To See a Fresh.....

In *Colors of the Gospels*, Sylvia is faithfully carrying out her God-given mission to bear witness to the particular vision she has been given--- to help us see a fresh what we have known (and not known) all along.



By displaying the traditional symbols in a creatively unusual manner, Sylvia enables us to experience the truths they represent through contrast-- indicating that unconventionality most often leads us closer to the heart of the matter, rather than away from it.

Sylvia portrays how the messages of the four evangelists might be woven together into a holistic tapestry of spiritual meditation and expression. The spiral, representing the spiritual journey, leads the viewer on a winding journey---in/out, up/down---the possibilities are endless. Like footprints blazing a trail in the darkness, the purple pathway signifies both the mystery and the suffering of Christ and foretells a similar destiny for the spiritual pilgrim. There is no ordinary road. Yet it does bring one into contact with the gospels at various turns. At these places, the softer, more uncertain pathway turns to solid stone and offers surer footing. This is Good News, indeed!

From a seminarian's point of view, this weaving/mosaic represents what the Ministry is all about: Gospel, witness, and perspective. Just as we ministers are story-*re*-tellers, testifying to the gospels by using old and new frames of reference, so Sylvia provides a new frame through which we might newly encounter the familiar stories.

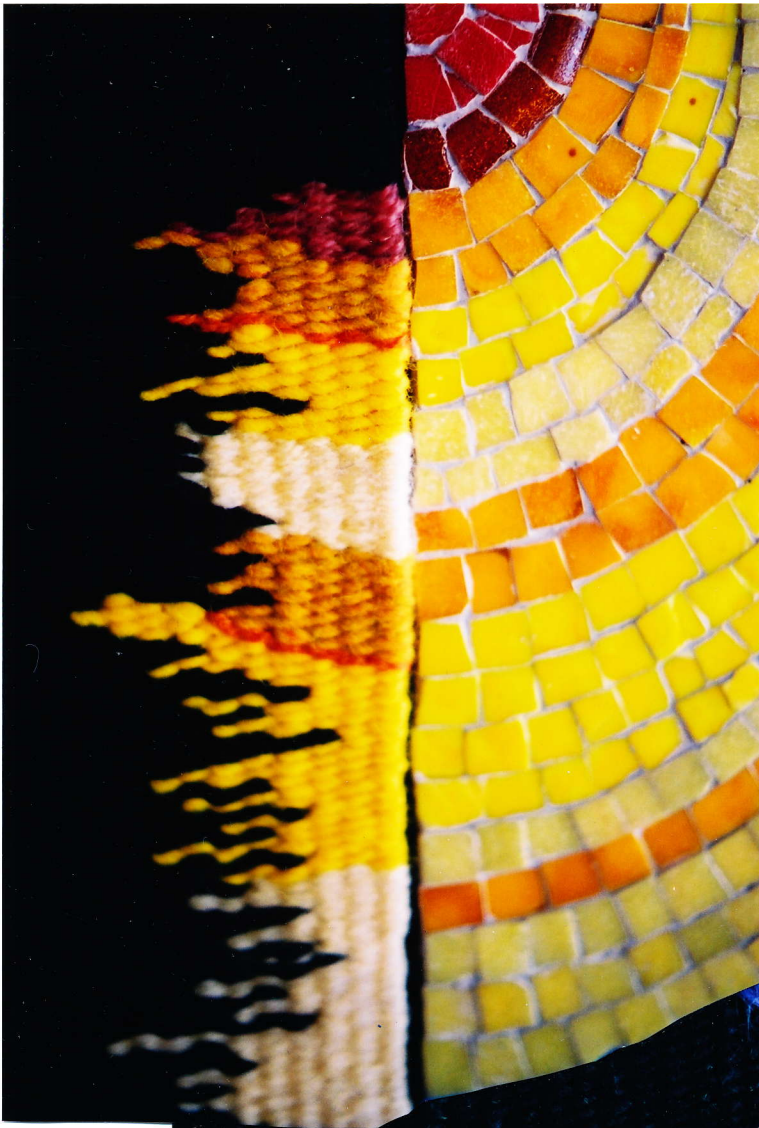
There are also surprises along the way. Take a closer look. Woven into this tapestry are signs from other lands--hints that there are more perspectives on this Gospel than we can imagine. The Gospels belongs to the entire world and all are invited to participate.



Participation is our role.

Sylvia as Artist-Prophet continually invites us to participate in her witness to the Gospel. As we do, we will gain a new perspective---not Sylvia's, but our own.

In this way, we are able to sojourn with Sylvia for awhile as we walk our spiritual paths.



Commissioned Works by Sylvia Johnson Everett

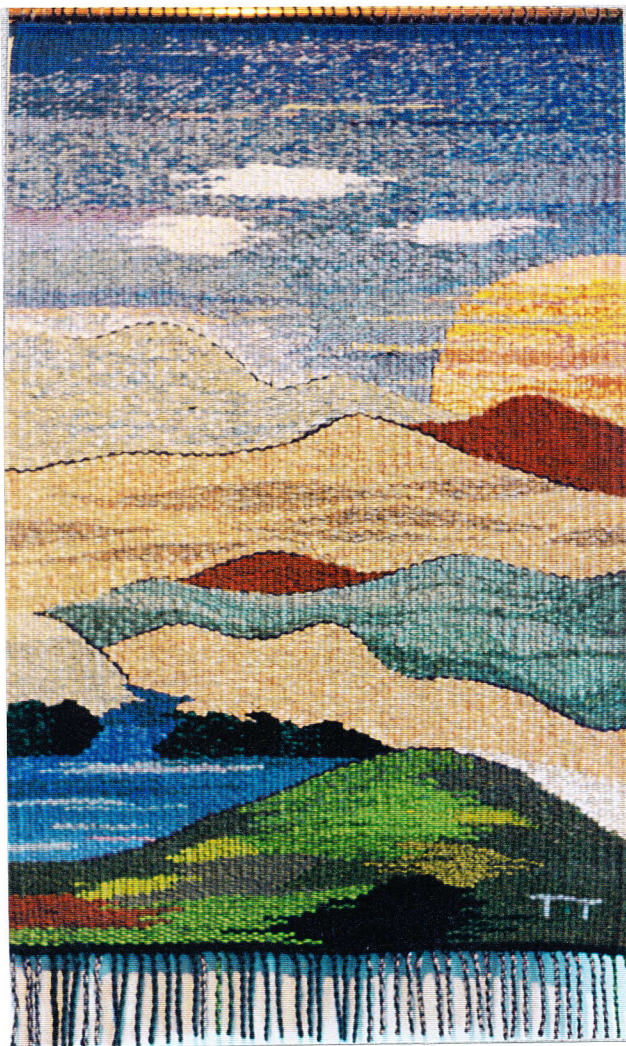
Our Light

Commissioned by Heidi King, 1996,
for the 50th Wedding anniversary
of her parents



The Macedonain Vision

Commissioned by UCC Church Needam, MA
for Retirement of The Rev. Paul Clayton, 1996



Dreamscape: Unto These Hills

Providence Lodge, Lake Junaluska, North
Carolina, 1996

Soli Deo Gloria

Prayer Rug

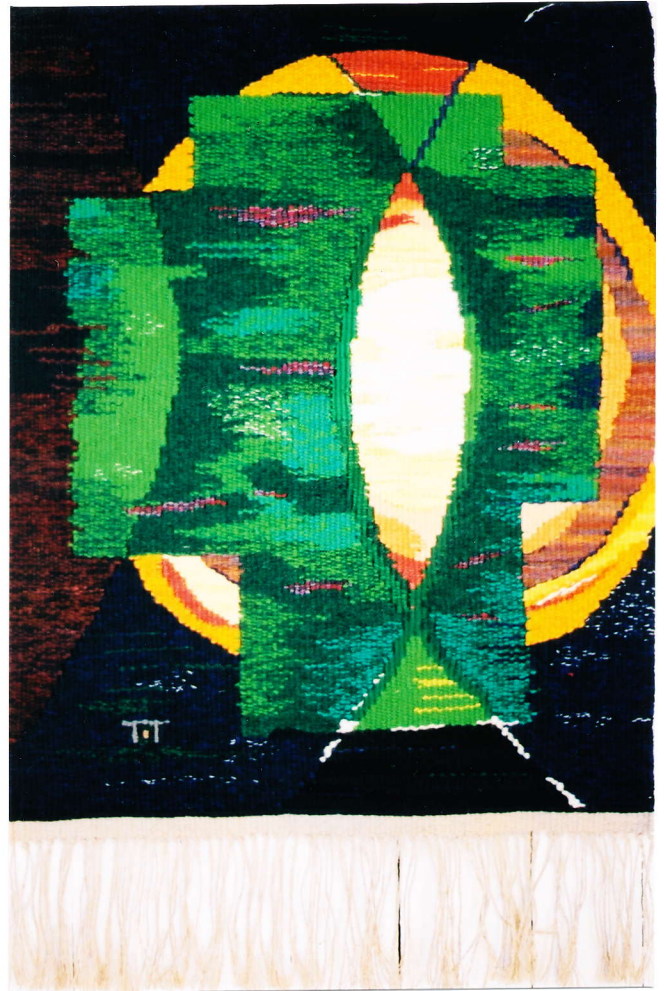
Gift to Sr. Mary Macrina Cowan
Commemorating the autonomy of the
Sisters of Saint Gregory, 1999



The Invitation

Commission by Andover Newton
for Mary Luti, 1998

The design is based on the ancient Vesica Picis, or “Vessel of the Fish”. It is found world-wide in many religious contexts to represent feminine creativity. In China, it represented the moon; India, the yonic or cosmic gateway. In Christianity, it is related to the fish symbol and in Medieval times, as the almond or mandorla, was used to surround holy figures, most often Jesus and Mary.



JOURNEY THROUGH THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Tapestries by Sylvia Johnson Everett

These three pieces were made for Colby Chapel at Andover Newton under an artist grant through the Luce Foundation during 1999-2001. They reflect upon the journey through theological education drawing upon traditional themes of the church year.

Responding to the Call

Autumn, Year one, Advent

Beginning/Gathering/Creation

This symbolizes the gathering of the community in the Fall and the beginning of the journey of examination of faith and theological education. This tapestry encompasses aspects of Advent and will hang in the chapel from September to the end of the term before Christmas.



Questions Hard at the Door

Winter, Year two, Lent

Struggle/Perseverance/Sacrifice

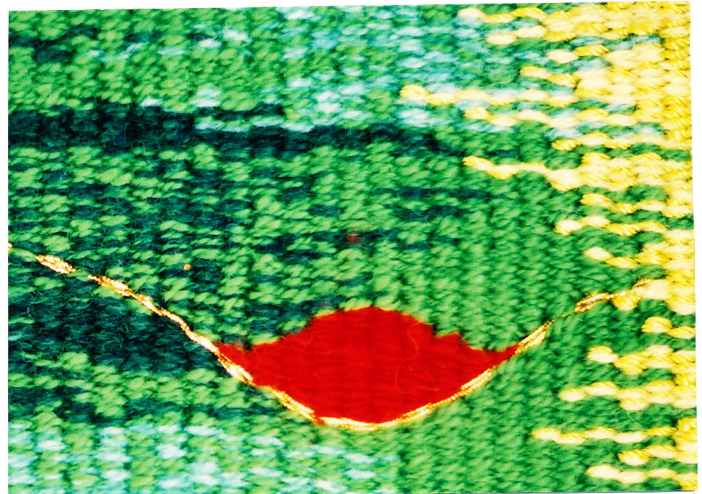
This work has aspects of Lent and symbolizes the second phase of the journey: questioning, doubt, darkness and struggle. It would be used in chapel from reconvening of school after Christmas until Easter.

Terrifying Joy

Spring, Year three, Easter/Pentecost

Overcoming/Reconstruction/Resurrection

This tapestry symbolizes the successful educational experience, completion of a journey. It incorporates symbols of Easter and Pentecost and is used from Easter to the end of the school year in May.



Three Liturgical Weavings

Mark Burrows

These three pieces mark the first installation of art in Colby Chapel since it was built in the early part of the last century. Despite the iconoclastic tradition that marks the Baptist heritage out of which Newton Theological Institution arose, Colby Chapel has several stained glass windows, most prominently the large image of the Transfiguration above the chancel. The challenge of imagining how to add new pieces, given this liturgical space, was not a small one. Sylvia finally decided on pieces that could be installed in a sequence, based in part on the liturgical year but shaped as importantly by the movements characterizing students' journey of theological education and formation. The first of these three pieces, appearing in the fall and symbolically representing students' first year, "Responding to the Call", hangs



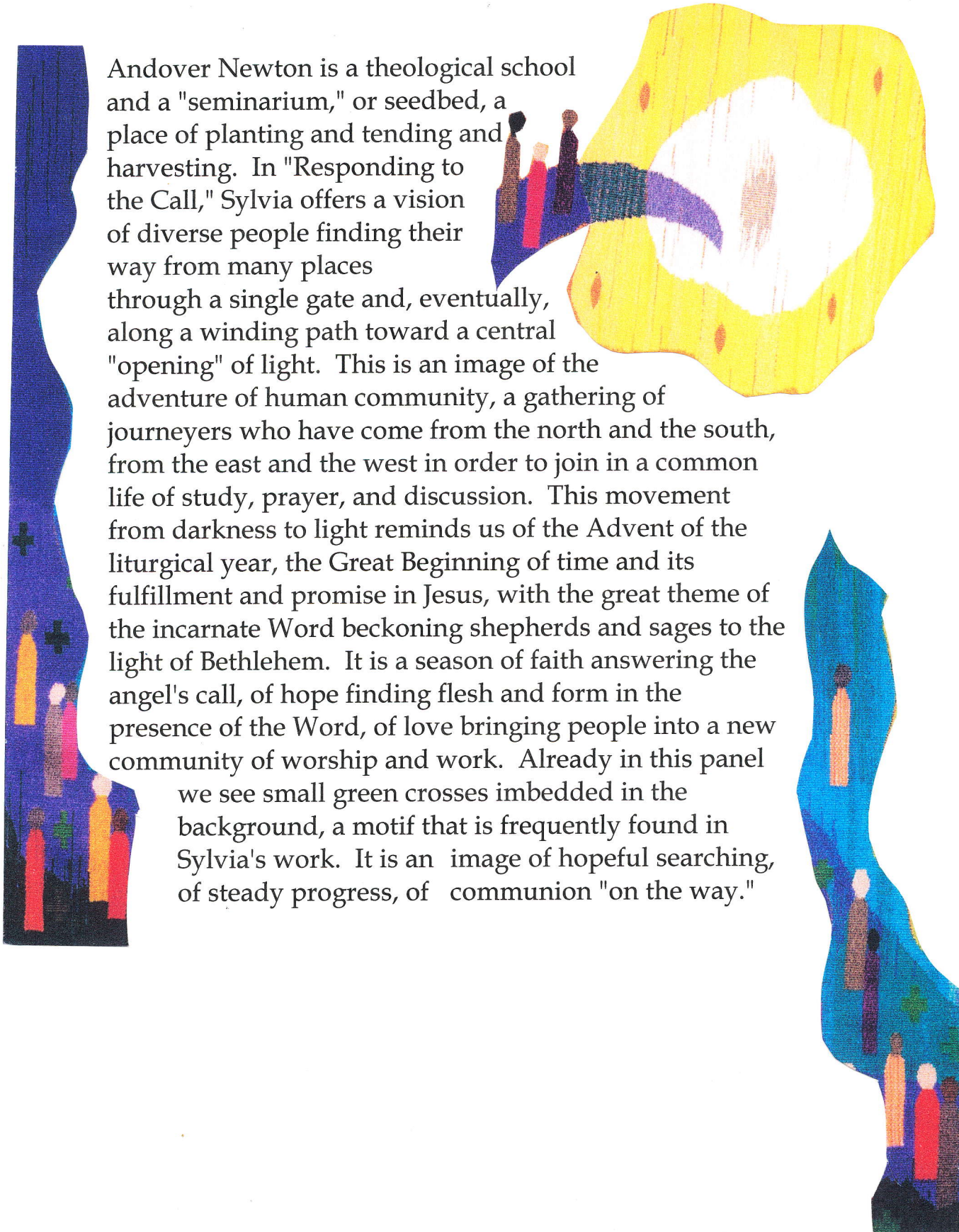
below the window at the center of the front chancel wall. The second, "Questions Hard at the Door," takes the form of two panels that hang on either side of the chancel, to be displayed in Lent and representing the "middler year(s)." The third, "Terrifying Joy," is again a single panel which appears beneath the Transfiguration window during Eastertide, the season leading toward graduation and Pentecost, and representing the final year(s) of study.

RESPONDING TO THE CALL



RESPONDING TO THE CALL

Andover Newton is a theological school and a "seminarium," or seedbed, a place of planting and tending and harvesting. In "Responding to the Call," Sylvia offers a vision of diverse people finding their way from many places through a single gate and, eventually, along a winding path toward a central "opening" of light. This is an image of the adventure of human community, a gathering of journeyers who have come from the north and the south, from the east and the west in order to join in a common life of study, prayer, and discussion. This movement from darkness to light reminds us of the Advent of the liturgical year, the Great Beginning of time and its fulfillment and promise in Jesus, with the great theme of the incarnate Word beckoning shepherds and sages to the light of Bethlehem. It is a season of faith answering the angel's call, of hope finding flesh and form in the presence of the Word, of love bringing people into a new community of worship and work. Already in this panel we see small green crosses imbedded in the background, a motif that is frequently found in Sylvia's work. It is an image of hopeful searching, of steady progress, of communion "on the way."



QUESTIONS HARD AT THE DOOR



But if community is a central dimension of seminary life, so are the ruptures that occur along the way. In the second set of panels, which flank the chancel and appear each year during Lent, Sylvia draws upon the Lenten call to the wilderness of prayer and fasting, reminding us that seminary can - and perhaps should - also be a testing place. Here, the engagement of study and conversation can lead us not only to communion but to a breaking place, a part of the journey where the chorus of voices sometimes falls into discord and we find ourselves estranged from the familiar patterns of faith and life that once sustained us. The broken rings, the overturned and spilling chalice, symbolize this, suggesting that the vocational search can lead us toward difficult passages and losses along the way. The encounter with God and the deepening of this journey, as the dark hues suggest, is not always warm and welcoming; it can also be confusing, even troubling, forcing us to let go of safe and comforting commitments, both spiritual and intellectual, with which we had commenced our studies. If faith is, as the writer of Hebrews affirms, the "assurance of things hoped for," it is also and inevitably "the conviction of things not seen"; something of this tension dances in the gold edges set against the deep purple cloth. But perhaps, these twin panels seem to whisper, this entering into darkness is not only difficult but necessary as a ripening of faith. For as the poet Roethke once reminded us, "In a dark time the eyes begin to see. . .". This Lenten image, flanking the pulpit and lectern, impresses upon us the demands of faith and life when we find ourselves called out of the bright light that gathers us into a longer and perhaps lonelier darkness than we'd known before.



TERRIFYING JOY

This wilderness wandering is never, however, the final word.

The promise of resurrection is always before us, even as we find ourselves lingering at the empty tombs of our lives with words of promise echoing in our ears. The final panel, "Terrifying Joy," reminds us of the journey into Eastertide and toward Pentecost, the startling news of hope that calls us from the shadows of uncertainty and loss toward a vibrant, greenening cross. Here, the seminary journey finds expression as a mending place, and at the same time a sending place, a place of gathering the holy energy of the divine and a place of embodying that energy for the world into which we find ourselves sent.

In a complex and elaborately simple blend of motifs, we see a central green cross set within the circling frame of a blazing sun. At its center, as if superimposed within the cross, a brightly lit mandorla symbolizing the womb of the universe prevalent in Buddhist and Hindu traditions veritably shimmers with light. From this central focal point, tongues of flame representing the energy of holy wisdom break forth toward the cobalt blue of the heavens as if in witness to the gospel claim that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn. 1.5). These dancing red tongues announce the gift of witness, and promise a resurrection of life from death, beckoning us to embrace the journey of faith as one that calls us into the heart of the divine and, at the same time, out into the waiting world.



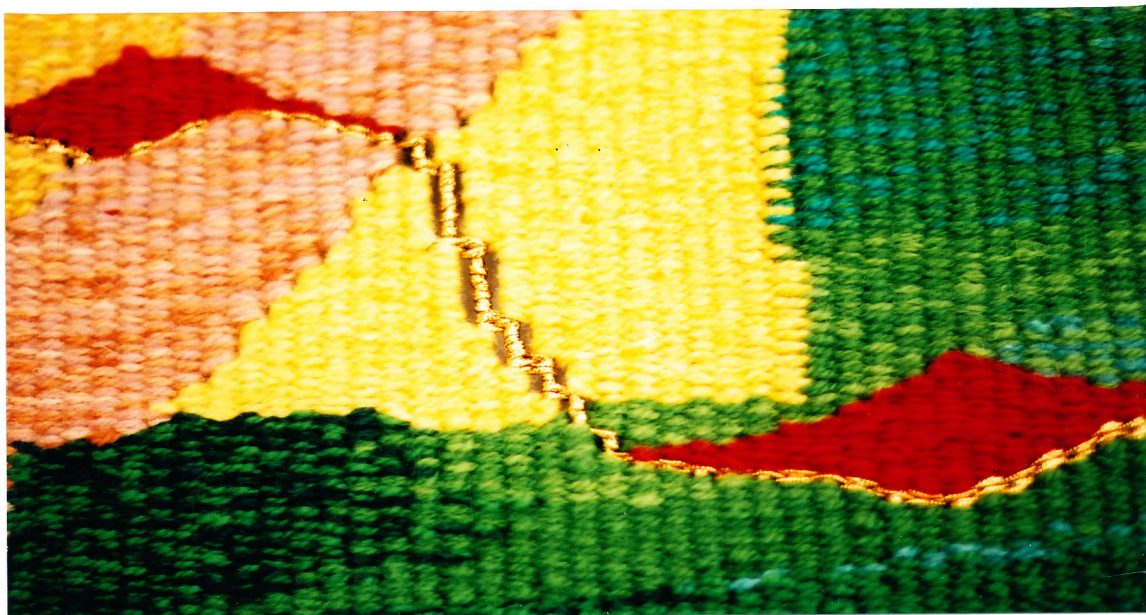
Power of these woven images...

This is an image of healing, and of sending forth; of restoring, and of commissioning. The great enfleshment of the Word continues, in the strong motifs of this panel, in the church's call heard at Pentecost, as if anticipating the seminarians' journey through graduation toward new commencements of ministry.



The power of these woven images invites us to envision the movement of seminary at its most profound depths, from gathering through the disorientation and dark wonderings of doubt and loss to the great callings by which we leave this community for new horizons of work and worship and play. They also suggest another way to appropriate the experiential rhythms of the liturgical year in terms of a journey of discovery and formation. And, of course, the annual completion of the cycle reminds us, lest we might forget, that the pattern of our Christian vocation is not linear but rather a spiraling of life. Here, in image and pattern, in texture and color, we "see" the wisdom echoed by the poet T. S. Eliot who reminded us that

**We shall not cease from our exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.**



MOSAICS by Sylvia Johnson Everett

or

Watching transformation in and through the artist.

In our conversation about Sylvia's work, I asked Bill Everett about the maturing or deepening of her creativity that has been emerging in her work with mosaics and evident in the large tapestries. He responded that her current works are expressing her intentions rather than being imposed upon them. Moving from the applique and embroidery to the weavings and mosaics we can see, as Bill describes, "intention inherent in the structure of the symbolism", emerging, disclosing the power of the symbols to transform she who creates and those who behold.



This round table top was an early version of the communion table that Bill created for the chapel at Andover Newton. The round flowing waters of concentric circles now serves a focal point in the meditation room in The Center for Faith, Health and Spirituality.

In the center of the round communion table is an exquisite mosaic in rainbow colors. Who can come to this table and not be reminded we are gathered as community in the body of Christ, as the body of Christ!



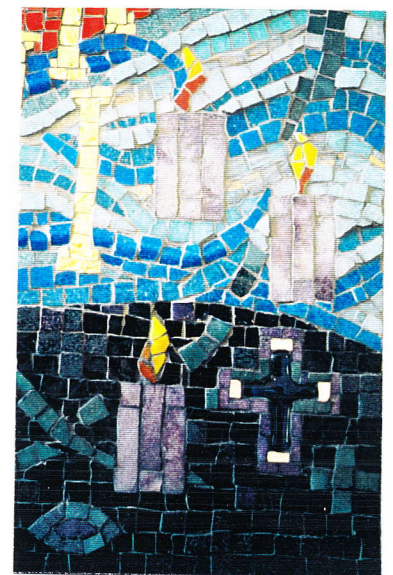
Crosses and World Tree



We are reminded of Sylvia Everett's understanding of her spiritual vocation "is to create an alternative and contemporary religious imagery through imaginative, stimulating, and spiritually uplifting art appropriate to the late 20th century and into the 21st."



Three very different crosses for our times have hung in the hallways of the third floor of Sturtevant reminding us that health must not be just an individual human condition.



The artist's vision, creation and gift.

Firebird Descending



"The handwoven tapestry uses color and form to depict the dramatic incursion of love into our lives. That love may be realized through the incarnation of the Christ spirit as remembered in Advent, through the fiery descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, or through the extraordinary experience of human love."

Sylvia Johnson Everett

FIREBIRD DESCENDING

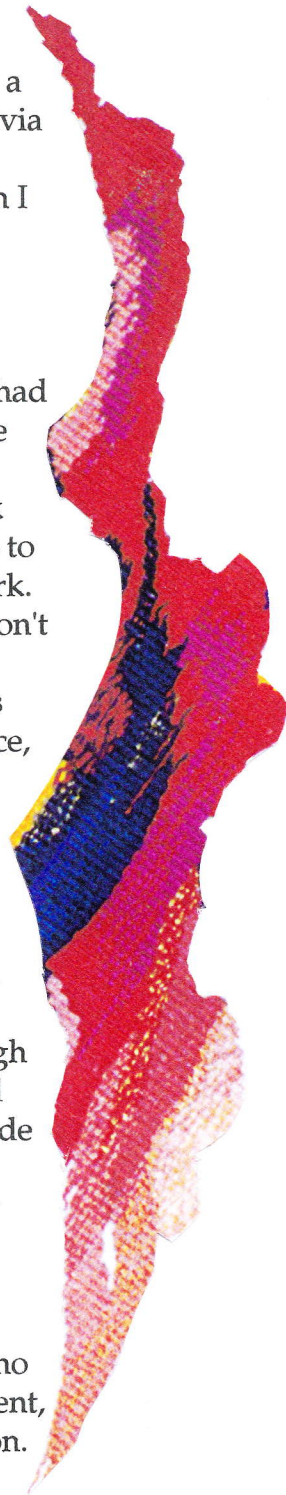
Reflections by Beth Nordbeck

Last week I went downstairs to the Peck Room, in one of those rare moments when the telephone wasn't ringing and people weren't at the door waiting for a meeting. My purpose was to sit quietly for a moment and contemplate the Sylvia Everett weaving called "Firebird Descending," which hangs to the left of the mantel. It wasn't there. For a moment of horror I thought, "No! Not this!" Then I realized that—of course—the weaving had already been taken down for the retrospective of Sylvia's work at the Meetinghouse. I decided to sit and contemplate anyway.

Without the weaving, the Peck Room looks vaguely bereft of purpose, as if it had reverted to its former life as a somewhat seedy faculty lounge in which no one ever lounged. This is, of course, the way many parts of our campus looked before Sylvia embarked on her one-woman aesthetic renewal project that took six years. But what a difference those six years have made! Wherever visitors to this campus enter, they can't walk far without encountering Sylvia's handiwork. And not just her own creations, either. Some artists are self-promoters who won't touch the work of others. Not Sylvia Everett. Her careful eye and hand are evident in the placement of dozens of art objects from the Taylor collection, as well as in her own spectacular weavings that grace the Worcester Hall entrance, the chapel, the annual academic catalog, and the now-bereft Peck Room.

Sylvia describes "Firebird Descending"—the weaving I planned to contemplate—as a tapestry that "uses color and form to depict the dramatic incursion of love into our lives." This is an apt description, it seems to me, of Sylvia's own work with us —although I suspect she, a modest person, would deny it. There are, she reminds us in her written description of this dramatic blue and yellow and black and white piece, many ways to realize love: through the incarnation, the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, human relationships. I'd add that love is also experienced in surprising beauty, in everyday spaces made sacred by objects of loveliness that wordlessly invite us in and bid us to be welcome. If this is true, then—thanks to Sylvia Everett—this old campus now overflows with sacred, unexpected, welcoming spaces.

No doubt there are a few miles to go before we become the truly welcoming community we desire to be. But if we've gone a ways on that journey, it is in no little measure because of Sylvia Everett's gracious gifts to us: her time, her talent, her woman's wisdom, her formidable eye and hand, and her theological vision.

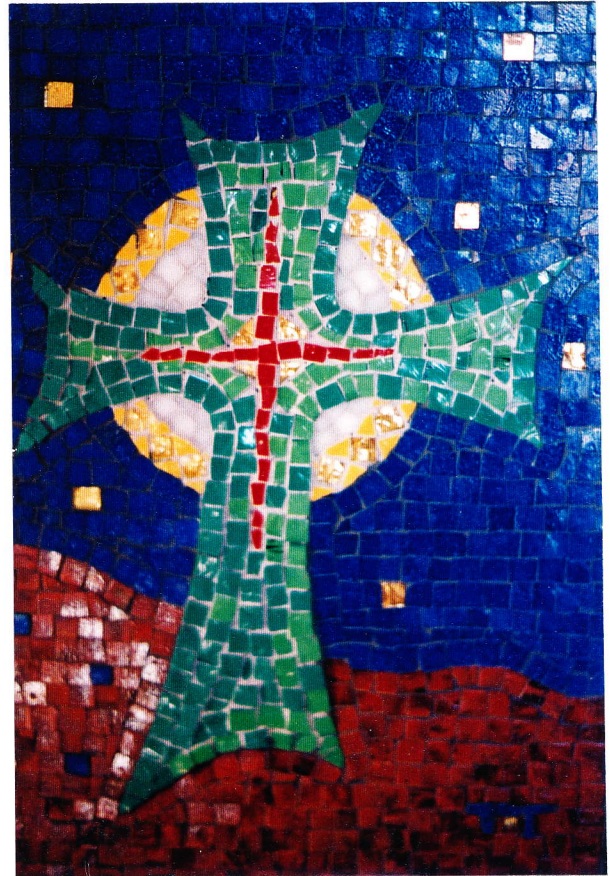


THE *ARTIST* IN RESIDENCE

Robin M. Jensen

One can talk about theology and art all one wants, but we will never understand the smallest thing about this intersection without honest-to-goodness artists working among us.

I am often self-conscious or even chagrined by the way we academic types abstract from experience and try to explain it, as if to avoid first hand knowledge. I suppose that theory is important, and that ideas are real things, too, but still ---the artist usually feels no compelling need to analyze the process of making or seeing art(or at least can give it a rest). Sometimes simply to do is reason enough. In fact, the process of creativity is almost more pure when it is allowed to be its own justification---just as it is, and for no other secondary purpose. Beautiful object or the poem or moments of song are theological expressions in themselves, just as they are. They are not conceptual aids or illustrations of ideas. They can just exist quite independently.



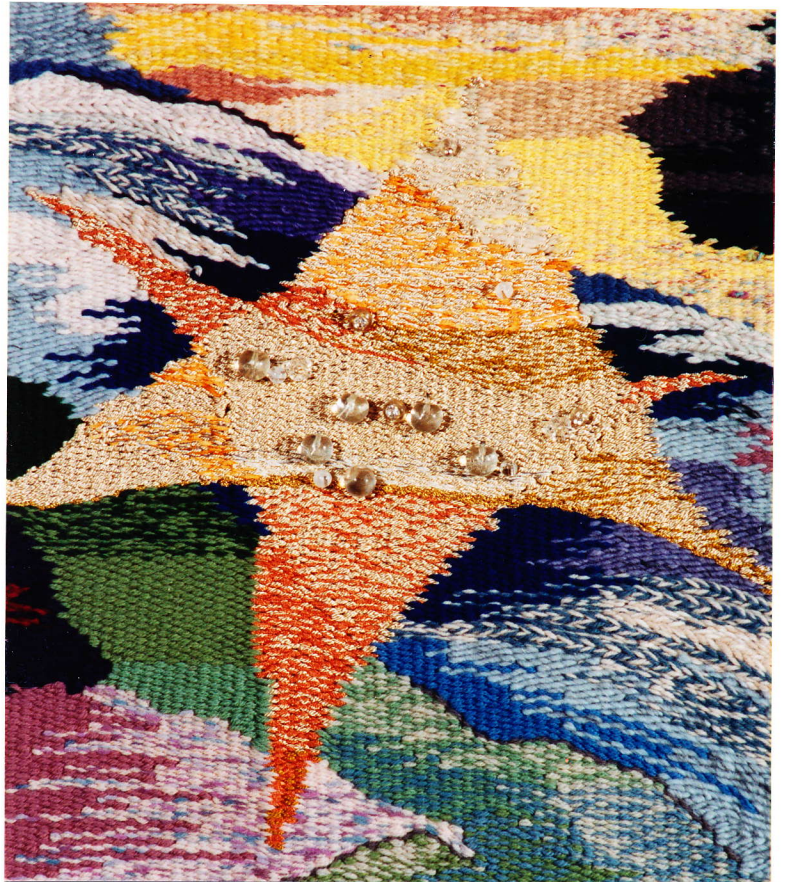
Like the transcendent things we encounter from time to time (God, love, joy), art needs neither rationale nor explanation. We could not thrive --or perhaps even live-- without it.



Artists working among us....partners in the creative work

Our task as theologians is to gain some understanding and appreciation of this fact, even while we write long essays or abstract philosophical treatises on the purpose and function of aesthetics for theologians or as we stand in box-like classrooms lecturing on the role of the arts for the church in words that we hope will be compelling or persuasive. In the end, art is what will do it--in its pure and generous reality. It is own argument and its own defense.

Scholars who otherwise retreat to their prose must risk a relationship with art because without it we will have only empty and useless knowledge, however well intended. We remain concept-encumbered scholastics, trying to count the angels or write wordy definitions of beauty all the while missing both the angels and the beauty.



At the same time, the artist live in this same community, and it is also their community. Their task is to tell something about the life and the work of this place in ways that are real to them, that make sense, that give them vision and voice. Our return for their gift is that grounding and blessing, that challenge and stretch. We become partners in the creative work. ideas are offered and then returned in a visible or tactile form. The arguments, the stories, and the passions of this place of the mind can be (we hope) the fuel for the fire, that fire that gives both light and heat to our work together.

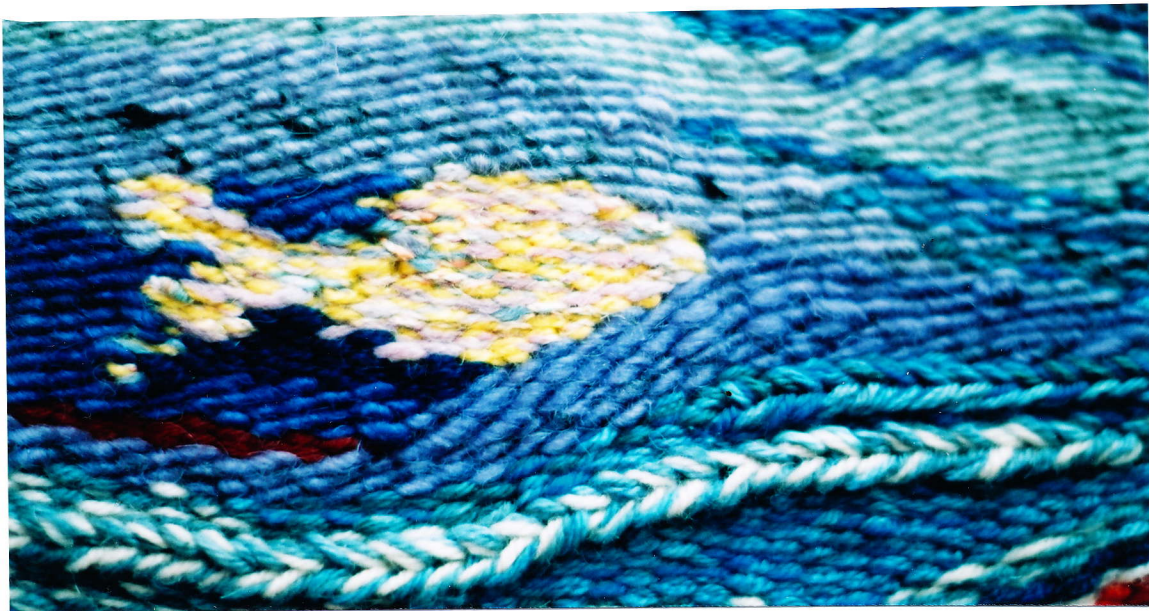


So, the artist in residence has her work among us, and it is crucial. Most of all it helps us to feel both honored and honest. If we are witnesses to the work, so much more will we love and appreciate the results. In the end we can only know the role of art in our lives only by experience, both making and seeing. And gradually even the most cognitive oriented of us will come to understand that all the explanations and theories and abstractions we can formulate will be unfinished until they attain a visible form and a dynamic reality. All the philosophers and theologians honing and editing their ideas, diagramming their systems, and debating their terms are, therefore, lost without the artists.

We need to place them in the center of our work, at the crossroads of learning and worship, ideas and imagination, discipline and delight. Without them we would be a dull bunch, and our churches, schools, or homes impoverished and incomplete.



And we dare to hope that the artists also would be diminished without us (the left-brained ones), driven crazy with our ideas and our issues, our relentless search for the answers to questions that may have no answers, or even many different answers. We offer our tangled wool to the weaver, who takes it like an ancient alchemist, spinning it to gold and weaving images for us so that we may see what we were thinking about and know it in a new way.



The artist in residence thus is our partner and our inspiration. She is mediator and mentor. She completes our sentences after words cease to satisfy. She has dared to see and to imagine and to reproduce visions and dreams.



We are awe-filled and grateful.

Like ancient alchemist....



She Renews all Things

Brita Gill-Austern

Sylvia, you transformed my world at Andover Newton and my imagination of the possible through the beauty of your art. You have taught me again and again through the gift of your seeing that contemplative attention is not about dreaming of the future, but about awakening to the fullness and possibility of this present moment.

The academic looks at the restricting, confining brick walls and asks how could anyone be so stupid to build classrooms with no windows in this kind of environment and dreams of money that might be raised to cut holes in the bricks. You, Sylvia the artist come among us, see brick, blank wall, an empty staircase and lift our vision to the possibility of the present moment. I can't believe the power of that one canvas, *Shekinah*, to awaken wonder, hope, beauty and imagination within me. Starved for the aesthetic within the lifeless brick walls, your *Shekinah* made each morning's jaunt up the stairs an opportunity to be surprised by joy, wonder and possibility.



Not only God, but also creative artists like you, renew all things through beauty. How richly we have been blessed by your presence, by your vision and by your playful imagination. You have awakened our hearts and our eyes to see anew, also making us more creative because you have been among us.

What a gift, what a blessing, what a joy your presence among us!

She Renews all Things

Mary Macrina Cowan

The light streaming into the Meetinghouse has always been part of what creates such a sacred feeling in this space. What a gift to have Sylvia's work all together in this space which she helped to renew as a place to "encounter the creative spirit in the arts and in each other...."



a house of true meeting and, we hope, of God's blessing for all."

SYLVIA JOHNSON EVERETT



Overbrook
465 Harriett's Trail
Waynesville, NC 29786
Tel. 704-452-0965



Resident Artist in the Theology and Arts Program at Andover Newton Theological School from 1995 to 2001.

The purpose of my work as an artist is to create an alternative and contemporary religious imagery through imaginative, stimulating, and spiritually uplifting art appropriate to the late 20th in to the 21st century. I am primarily a symbolist and colorist.

I consider my work as an artist to be a way to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions, and to be my spiritual vocation. Figures, texts, and ideas from my own and other religious traditions are used as subjects of interpretation as well as reflection on contemporary life, interior landscapes, and natural environment.

Education

1962, Bachelor of music University of Oregon

1984, Master of Science: Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Arts Training

Annette Hirsch, Drawing and Pastels, Milwaukee

Susan Powers, Painting on silk, Atlanta

Sheila Raj, Symbolism, Bangalore, India

Jyoti Sahi, Symbolism. Inscape, Bangalore, India

Heidelberg, Germany, Volschochschule, Watercolor, Painting on Silk

Isabella Asratyan, Tapestry Weaving, Atlanta

Callenwolde Fine Arts Center, Weaving, Atlanta

Artistic Media

Textiles, including weaving, batik, painting on silk, fabric collage, and freeform embroidery. Glass mosaic

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Colors of the Gospels

Paper Cuts

Chapel Tapestries

**Introduction, Spiritual Imprint
of the Artist, Meditation on Cross,
Mosaics,**

In the Beginning

She Renews All Things

Preface, The Good Seed

The *Artist* in Residence

Firebird Descending

Reflections on Sylvia Everett

Extraordinary Time

PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

All photographs were taken by Mary Macrina Cowan except as noted.

- p. 2 Detail from *Questions Hard at the Door*
 Photo of Bill and Sylvia Everett courtesy of Publications, Andover Newton
 Background detail from Easter of *Extraordinary Time*
- p. 3 Detail from *Music, Harmony*
- p. 4 Detail from a Paper cut in Wisdom's Table studio
- p. 5 Detail from
- p. 6 Detail from *Music, Melody*
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Woven Prayers, Green Crosses and the Gospel According to Mother Nature

Retrospective Exhibition
Sylvia Johnson Everett
Resident Artist, 1995-2001
Andover Newton Theological School



The Meetinghouse
210 Herrick Road
Newton Centre, MA
Tues, Wed, Thur, 1-5pm
or by appointment
617.964.0911 / 617.928.0713

Reception May 2, 5-7pm

