WORDS TO KNOW

Archival/Archives: Documents and objects that are important to the history of a person, place, or event.

Artist-built environment: A unique place—frequently a home—that is transformed. Often inspired by the life experiences of the artist, they typically are made of materials that are easily accessible and found nearby.

Assemblage: An artwork made of various two- and three-dimensional materials that are put together.

Chronological: Arranged in the order of time that something happened.

Collaboration: When two or more people work together to accomplish something.

Collection: The artwork that a museum owns; the museum either purchases or is given the work. When a museum decides to keep a work or purchase a work, it is called accessioning. Accessioning an artwork means that the museum agrees to care for it forever and maintain it through proper storage and conservation.

Contemporary artist: An artist who is making or made artwork after 1970.

Exhibition: A display of artwork, and often other objects and artifacts, that share something in common. Three possible examples are: they were all created by the same artist, they are all created in the same medium, or they are all part of a story from a moment in history.

Fiber: A natural material, such as cotton or wool, or synthetic material, such as polyester or acrylic, that can be used in weaving to create a fabric.

Gallery: A room where art is displayed.

Improvise: To create or perform in the moment without any preparation.

Retrospective: An exhibition that shows the development of the work of an artist over a period of time or throughout the artist’s entire life.

Studio: The space where an artist creates artwork. Studios can be different sizes and have different equipment and materials depending on the medium the artists use, the scale of their artwork, and their artistic processes.

Utilitarian: An object that has a specific function.

Warp: The threads that are warped, or stretched to have tension, on a frame or loom. They typically run vertically, or up and down.

Weaving (verb): Creating a fabric by interlacing materials through a fiber warp in various patterns.

LENORE TAWNEY (1907–2007)

Lenore Tawney was an American artist who is known for developing new ideas and techniques for creating art using fiber. She made other types of artwork during her life, including drawings, collages, and assemblages.

Lenore moved to New York City in 1957 when she was fifty years old and began to focus on making artwork using fibers. About ten years after moving to New York, Lenore had a studio space with very high ceilings. This space allowed her to create much larger work.

Her studio space is now a part of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center’s collection. It will be displayed in our new building, the Art Preserve, which opens August 2020. This is the first time that the Arts Center will label a studio space as an artist-built environment.

LENORE TAWNEY

Cloud Labyrinth

Cloud Labyrinth was created in 1983 for the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial in Switzerland. It is made of thousands of individual, tiny threads suspended from a fabric panel or “ceiling,” and is sixteen feet high and twenty-four by eighteen feet wide. Though Tawney was losing her eyesight as she created Cloud Labyrinth, she was able to knot each individual strand.

In the same gallery is a video of Cloud Dance, an improvised movement piece from 1979 made in a collaboration between Tawney and choreographer and dancer Andy De Groat. The dance was created in response to Four-Armed Cloud, another work in her Cloud Series.

Can you put these works in chronological order?

Match the year to the artwork and find the answers at the bottom of this page (find the artwork in the gallery if you are at the Arts Center) to see if you are correct!


In Fields of Light       St. Francis and the Birds       Shore       Shrouded River

Written in Water

Can you put these works in chronological order?

Match the year to the artwork and find the answers at the bottom of this page (find the artwork in the gallery if you are at the Arts Center) to see if you are correct!


In Fields of Light       St. Francis and the Birds       Shore       Shrouded River

Written in Water

Connect

If you do not consider yourself a fiber artist or have not learned about using fiber in art before, it can be difficult to understand why Lenore Tawney is so important.

Connect by thinking about the activity that you enjoy the most. Maybe you like to dance, sing, play a sport, play an instrument, decorate cakes, draw pictures of people, write poetry or stories, or act in plays.

Write the activity you are thinking about here

Now think about someone who is famous for doing what you love to do. They may be alive now or have passed away. For example, if you play soccer you might think about Cristiano Ronaldo.

Write the person you are thinking about here

_________________________________________________

When many artists who use fiber or are inspired by fiber see the work of Lenore Tawney, like the artists in Even thread [has] a speech, they feel just like you do when you watch, listen, or learn about the person you listed above.

It is great to be inspired by someone who has become an expert at something you admire, and it can also be motivating to see work by people like Lenore Tawney, who have changed the way we think about something.

If you made an artwork using fiber that was inspired by your favorite activity, what would it look like?

Draw your ideas below.

Ephemeral and Eternal

This gallery shows archival objects from Lenore Tawney’s life, such as journals, mail art, and handmade clothing.

Tawney explained that the postcards that she sent to friends “…came from wishing to communicate with friends, but not knowing what to say—you don’t want to say anything but what you want to be a friend…there was a message, but it was invisible.”

To whom would you like to send a wordless letter? Discuss together and make a plan to create artwork to send in the mail or give to someone special in your life.

Even thread [has] a speech

The eight contemporary artists in this exhibition use fiber materials and processes that follow in the footsteps of Lenore Tawney’s groundbreaking fiber experiments. Some of the artworks are outside of the gallery. You can find work in the Glass Gallery, in the Atrium, and outside on the Café Terrace.

Even thread [has] a speech installation view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2019.