

## TIM GRESHAM – “PHASE”

TAPESTRY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

At Craft ACT, Canberra

MASTER OF HIS CRAFT



'Liquid Module IV' 60x60cm 2008

“PHASE” is Melbourne artist Tim Gresham’s latest solo exhibition of photography and woven tapestry. Held at the Craft ACT gallery in Canberra, the show exudes a quiet confidence and accomplishment.

Gresham is a calm and unassuming artist, dedicated to his practice as a tapestry designer – weaver and photographer. He is a Queenslander by birth, and completed a Diploma of Creative Arts (Visual) at the University of Queensland, but now lives and works in Melbourne where he has had six solo exhibitions and participated in many group shows. His work has been acquired by public and private collections throughout Australia and he has completed several commissions.

He trained as a tapestry weaver at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop (now Australian Tapestry Workshop) where he learned precise methods and worked closely with artists interpreting their works. Unusual as a male tapestry weaver in the predominantly female Australian domain, he upholds the tradition of men training and working in the European ateliers until the 1960s when the first women were allowed to take up apprenticeships.

In this latest solo show there are 6 small framed tapestries – 15 x 15 cm, 6 medium format tapestries 60 x 60cm and 6 digital Type C prints 60 X 60 cm. The evenness of the number of works combined with the square measurements reflects the precision of tapestry weaving technique and image making in both tapestry and photography. This quality is reinforced by the precisely woven squares and tightly framed photographic images, giving a sense of calculated exactness. The skill is in the editing, deciding what to deal with and cutting out all extraneous detail to achieve minimal pieces.

Tapestry is by its nature a repetitive process, the weaver steadily building the image from base of the loom to the top of the tapestry, picking up the warp threads and passing the bobbin with the weft through the warp thousands of times. Although the weaver learns to automatically pick up every second warp in one direction and the alternate warps in the opposite direction, this process is usually not apparent in the finished work where traditional tapestries have narrative images demanding the viewer's attention. However, in Gresham's tapestries the "half pass" or "pick and pick" pattern and "hachure" techniques are elevated to be the focus and main player in the work. These techniques were historically used to show light and shade, volume and form in tapestries derived from paintings. They were weaverly interpretations, but as tapestry and painting became more closely associated and weavers strived to achieve more direct translations of the paintings the weaving techniques were dropped in favor of mixing colour on the bobbin to give more painterly effects. In "Phase" the tapestries resurrect and embrace the traditional techniques and exploit their ability to create light and shade, transitions between colours/tones and soft edges.

The rhythm of weaving is a steady repetition of movement from right to left and left to right – over and over again. Gresham's tapestries are all about this sense of weaving – the rhythm, the repetition and image working intrinsically with the medium. Overlapping, scalloped edge patterns and curved forms undulate and move to the beat across the surface like groupings of notes in a score of music. The warp is emphasised by the pick and pick pattern of the weft making subtle stripes that vibrate throughout the work. Shapes have stepped edges, calculated according to the warp and weft ratio. There is a tension between the given underlying grid structure and the artist's introduction of fluid design. The earlier compositions were carefully worked out on paper and prepared as cartoons for the weaving but as familiarity with ideas and processes developed the need for this disappeared and only a few markings on the warp were necessary as a guide.

Evoking reflection on Op Art and Bridget Riley's work with its sensations of movement and colour, Gresham's work has a softer and more naturalistic take on patterning and hue. Colour in a soft and muted light to mid tone palette of Australian bush hues with white is used to achieve subtlety and softness or vibrancy. Combined with the expert use of the repertoire of colour mixing techniques, there is control of blending soft, feathered edges or making sharp contrast. The optical effects created play with perspective and dimensionality, shifting our perceptions between the reality of the flat plane of the tapestry and the perceived visually undulating surface.

The photographs allude to the past through their black and white format which more importantly highlights graphic and tonal aspects. Although black and white film photography is now considered old technology, the work does engage with the digital through subtle manipulation of the images to enhance the lines and geometry of the architecture. The photographs point to the elements in Tim Gresham's urban environment that inspire his creative mind and hone his artists' eye for composition, contrast and form. Repetition in the surfaces of buildings, shadows softening graphic lines in concrete, reflections in water distorted by a rippling surface, convey the structures of our built environment modulated by the natural elements. These works share common themes with the tapestries: a sense of time; patterns continuing beyond the frame and contrast of underlying structure with distortion. They assert themselves as highly personal viewpoints of a contemporary city life experience.

Photography and tapestry have equal shares in the artist's practice. Ideas move freely between the two mediums – each used for its own particular qualities and character. The relationship is indirect but certainly there in the shared concerns of capturing light and shadow and in abstracting the experience of our contemporary urban environment. The mediums complement each other as tapestry requires dedicated hours spent at the loom and the photography requires exploration, looking and searching in the outside world.

In all of the works the image extends out from the cropped frame, suggesting infinity. The images provide a space to contemplate, to find pleasure in the universal sequences of forms, variations of the hand made shapes and lines and recognition of the time invested. "Phase" presents classic contemporary works to invest in, value, live with and enjoy into the future.

see: [www.timgresham.com](http://www.timgresham.com)

Valerie Kirk, Head of Textiles, The Australian National University.