

**'UNTITLED' 1970's
ROMEO REYNA, WOVEN FIBERS**

By Victoria Braverman 2019



Artist's Background:

Romeo Reyna; American, born 1935-2016, Lubbock, Texas

* **Education:** Chicago Art Institute, BFA

Otis College of Art and Design

Los Angeles Art Center, MFA

* **Influences:** Traditional Mexican Artisans and Scandinavian Modernism

* **Art Movement:** Modern Colorist Movement

* **Artist's Impact on the art world:** Distinguished Fiber Artist who developed large format wall artwork.

'Untitled' is a Gift of the artist in memory of his good friends Arthur Elrod and William Raiser

Impressions/ Analysis:

How could I resist investigating a work of art made of goat, camel and horsehair? This beautiful wall hanging is crafted using these and other natural fibers. It is a gift from the artist in memory of his dear friends Arthur Elrod and William Raiser who were designers in Palm Springs from 1954 through 1974. Reyna worked with them closely on many projects creating substantial art works for both commercial and residential properties throughout our valley.

Let me back up in the life of Romeo Reyna. He was born in Lubbock, TX not far from where his beloved grandmother lived across the border in Mexico. At her side he developed his love of color and learned the traditional way to use natural materials in weaving and pottery. He was exceptionally talented from an early age, which allowed him the distinction to enter The Chicago Art Institute at the tender age of sixteen, the youngest applicant to be accepted. His love of learning called him to continue studies at Otis Art

Center in Los Angeles and then onto LA Art Center where he achieved a Masters of Fine Art.

The style that distinguished Reyna is called Large Scale Off Loom tapestry, as mentioned in the 1984 Washington Post “Rugs to Riches: Art Works for a Living”. He used all natural materials and dyes that he carded by hand just like his grandmother taught him in her humble home in Mexico. Some of his hangings were enormous and weighed anywhere from 300 to 3000 pounds, as described in the Desert Sun, Nov 1976. One piece in the Hagadone Building, Coerd’Alene, Idaho, is four stories tall. Another work is seventy-two feet wide and installed in our McCallum Theater.

His colorful weavings delight me in several ways. The large scale holds my attention and tells me this work has something to say, while the vibrant colors pull me into the artist’s narrative. Finally, the lush textures lure me into a different world beyond other 2-D art. Reyna was an artist of our great southwest. **“UNTITLED”** describes desert landscape offering a soft view through colors and tactile surfaces.

Compare and Contrast with Museum Collection:

Textile art is one of the oldest forms of decorative expression in human civilization.

In ‘**Osho**’ Faig Ahmed puts a contemporary spin on carpet weaving by redesigning hundred-year-old traditional carpet designs using his computer program. His program is able to extrude the colors and patterns to form an expression entirely new and inventive. One difference between these two pieces is that Reyna’s work is woven solely by him; in contrast Ahmed is a conceptual artist whose rug is woven by

traditional weavers. Reyna's work expresses his connection to the earth and elements.

Reyna and Ahmed, are perfect examples of connecting people to art and culture in ways that change perceptions by offering new experiences, as mentioned by Alice Rawsthorne in her book "Design as an Attitude." Once you see through their eyes you can never go back to the expected nor will you repeat the same vision again.

Creativity is sparked within you whether you chose it or not. Similarly both artists use traditional materials to express exciting visions. Reimagining these ancient crafts of weaving encourages the viewer to break away from convention and feel art in new ways. They take us to an imaginary place while still seeming familiar.

On our third floor gallery, Deborah Oropallo's "**George**," is a tapestry using a French style of weaving from the 1700's. She is a contemporary artist using jacquard tapestry to execute her design. Jacquard is machine loomed which creates a smooth even surface conducive to expressing Oropallo's multi-view montage of images. Reyna's style of off loom is in sharp contrast to Oropallo's work.

Hans Baumann in his 1962 book "**The Caves of the Great Hunters**" explains that pigments were used in our earliest cave art. There is a strong similarity between the explosion of color in Rufino Tamayo's "**Le Volcan**" 1958, currently on exhibition at PSAM, and Romeo Reyna's dynamic work. Although Tamayo uses paint and Reyna uses fibers they make the same impact through the magic of color. Both artists take you out of your normal.

How this piece may be toured:

I believe there are so many relevancies brought to light for us by Reyna's "**UNTITLED**". His work is a subtle but important historical connection to the Golden Era of Modernism here in Palm Springs. His creative collaboration with interior designers and architects continues to bring distinction. His tapestry is cited in a 1975 Architectural Digest Magazine article covering the Palm Springs architecture of Steve Chase. It should not be overlooked that the fabulous color combinations and outrageous scale of his work make an impact and statement of it's own.

It's important to know the overall history of tapestry starting when the avant-garde revitalized European tapestry in the early 20th century. It was the German, Bauhaus, which was foundational in this renewal with the ideas and techniques that proved deeply influential on the later Modernist movement. Combining experimental materials with a mathematical approach to weaving created fantastic new tapestries. These experiments were so exciting that Picasso, Klee, Kandinsky and Miro gave license to weavers to use their designs. There was an abundance of new modalities to create tapestry in France, Germany and Scandinavia.

Through the 1950's-1970's the wide expanse of bare walls, which distinguished the modern style, cried for color to express the optimism of the post war period. Rather than bland manufactured materials, all ingredients were exuberant in their form and singing with bold color.

ArtNet.com explains that it is during these years that modernism sprouted roots here in the desert as architects and designers responded to the growth in the modern style. Art had become increasingly abstract allowing a focus on materials and texture. Romeo Reyna worked with the interior designers to complement their spaces with color. Like a breath of fresh air, wall hangings had luminous, alluring

colors, wonderful movement in a kaleidoscope of billowing forms. It is easy for me to invite guests into Color Games and ask for questions during this tour.

The Scandinavians introduced sculpted colorful abstract design that conveyed expression, which became one of the strongest forces in interior environments. Scandinavian “open weave” had an influence going forward in contrast to the machine made rugs of the 1800’s which were done in tight patterns and even textures.

I learned through various readings that innovators in any field summon courage as well as vision. Often we see parallel explorations between two artistic disciplines. As Rufino Tamayo, the great painter and colorist, showed values essentially oriented toward expansion rather than limitations. Both Tamayo and Reyna saw a need for universality in art. They each expressed through large scale and fantastic use of color.

To quote an amazing book titled “Textures of Our Earth” Fiber Arts: “Craft is mastery and technique to produce an object by hand; add these skills to intension and imagination one creates art. If the beholder is drawn in the world of the maker’s values, sharing the vitality, intensity, and mystery, he may recognize the essential elements emanating from a work that goes beyond craft. Only then does one sense that the distinction between the craft maker and the true artist is precisely that the former knows what he can do and the later pursues the unknown.”

Currently, there are artists of varying disciplines expressing their statements through dynamic fiber works. Such as, world acclaimed photographer Tom Lamb takes to the sky to map our earth creating magnificent tapestries on a grand scale. Our spring edition of Art Patron Magazine 2019

devotes a photographic spread and article to his work emphasizing the current interest in the woven art form.

Visitor Engagement:

I include Reyna's piece in my tour explaining the significance of his dynamic desert design. All art is contemporary in its own time and may reflect it's surroundings. Our museum's mission is: "PSAM creates transformative experiences that expand our understanding and the world. We connect people to the art and culture of the times."

I was also intrigued by MyModernMet.com, which encourages us to ask questions. Reyna's tapestry so perfectly applies to questions including:

1. What are the Materials, the colors and shapes?
2. Would you take this home and why?
3. How does design affect our life?
4. Does the scale of his work influence the meaning of the space in which it is displayed?
5. How does it make you feel?
6. How would you describe it to a blind man?

Bibliography:

2019 Art Patron magazine

2019 mymodernart.com

2019 "The Weavers Loom" the Modern Lap Loom Weavers Resource Blog

2019 PS Art Museum Mission Statement
2018 The Art of Forgery by Noah Chaney
2018 "Design as an Attitude" by Alice Rawsthorne
2016 Desert Sun Obituary
2008 Architectural Design Magazine
1987 Desert Sun "Tapestry at McCallum Theater"
1984 The Washington Post "Rugs to Riches: Art Works for a Living"
1976 Desert Sun "Contemporary Weaving by Romeo Reyna at the PSAM"
1962 "The Caves of the Great Hunters" by Hans Baumann
Askart.com
Texas Tech University Library

Local works of this artist:

1987 Installation at the Bob Hope Cultural Center aka McCallum Theater

1976 Tapestry Show at the Palm Springs Art Museum