

Regional

Strand teaches the art of weaving in a new world

When the phrase “fine arts” is mentioned, oftentimes the first two things that come to mind are painting and sculpture. But the fine arts include many other media, including textiles. One person who specializes in that particular medium is Laura Strand, a professor in the department of art and design at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Born in Minneapolis, Minn., Strand received her bachelor’s of fine arts degree from Georgia State University in Atlanta and her master’s in fine arts from the University of Kansas in Lawrence. Although initially interested in painting, Strand took a college weaving class and realized that she could bring to her art making what she had learned as a child from her mother.

“My mother made our clothes,” Strand said. “She did lots of things around the house. She also had a career as an X-ray technician. I could make a combination between the apprenticeship learning of one person to one person and the intellectual learning engaged in a college environment. I thought of that as a deep investment in my own life.”

The area of textiles in art is a very broad field that involves weaving, surface design and decorations of fabrics. These fabrics can be dyed, screen-printed, folded, stitched and engaged in lots of very different ways. Strand’s experience includes all kind of materials when it comes to weaving, including strings, wires, and telephone wire.

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

“Anything flexible, anything vaguely flexible can be woven into a surface,” she said, adding that techniques are really more of a means than a goal.

“My notion is that a technique can give you what you need to communicate and that rather than master it as a whole you find the way to master it towards what you want to say,” Strand said. “And it is an avenue of discovery, and an avenue of building expertise, and this is part of also what thrills me about textiles is that I have been at it for 30 years and I investigate new things all the time.”

Strand said that she is excited about what opportunities new technologies are opening up in the use of textiles.

“When I first came out of school in the early ‘80s I found that my teacher had found a (computer) program. They were teaching how to weave on a computer at Georgia Tech and so I took a course there. It was the first time I had had that experience of seeing a computer weave, but it is really very easy,” Strand said.

One of Strand’s publications is titled “Textiles: A Contemplative Language.”

What does that title mean?

“I learned that in Greek ‘texto’ means to weave and it comes into the English language as ‘text’ and ‘textile’ so my little twist suggests that it is to speak through textiles, to



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Professor Laura Strand, at right, discusses weaving.

make a voice and a communication through textiles and my heart is in that,” she said. “I believe that it is a vocalization of thought to

niques and so you make an object and you communicate through it.”

Strand said that special talent is not required to work with textiles. “Talent is one of those misnomers that people suggest is true in the world but it really isn’t,” she said. “When I was an undergraduate the department chair said, ‘An artist has to know everything, an artist has to be able to talk about everything, everything is potentially art,’ and that’s true. So any person who has a desire to make music or to be in theater or to make artwork all you need is a desire because it is 99 percent work and perhaps 1 percent spark.”

Obviously artists love what they do, but can they make a living out of it, particularly in these difficult financial times?

“Nineteen-eighty-one is when I graduated and so I know that I came into the world exactly where my students are coming into the world today, and I made a living at my work,” Strand said. “Now, it isn’t a rich living. It is not going to be a wealth of money and it requires hard work and innovation. And so I think that we really put students through a very rigorous process as art students. We demand a lot of their time. We demand a lot of their energy and their attention.”

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, “Segue,” can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.

make an artwork and I think that when you put an artwork together tiny bit by tiny bit, weaving and printing are construction tech-