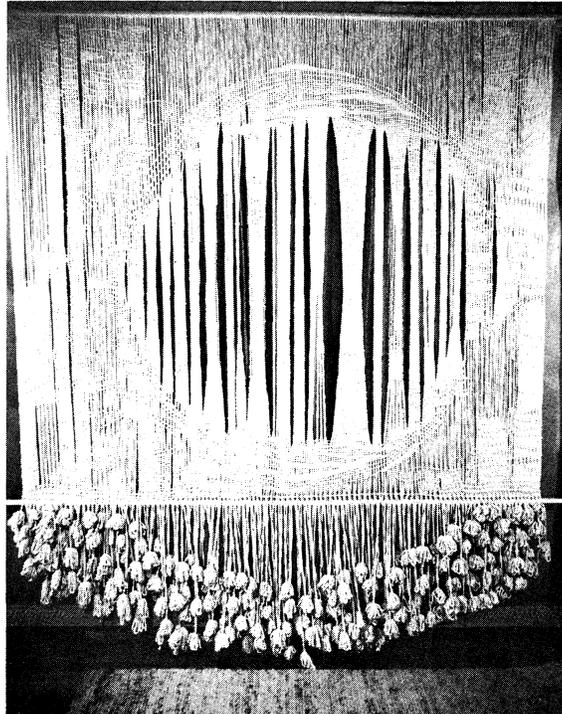


Art as My Link with History

Inga Long



Inga Long Untitled 1977, 7½' x 8', weighted warp tapestry, white cotton. ess oh ess

For the past eight months I have worked with a group of women artists who have generously given me the intellectual and emotional support I needed to begin realizing and developing my artistic potential seriously.

I received formal art education in Germany in the mid-fifties which I am confident can be likened to a traditional art education anywhere. It never occurred to me then to be so 'presumptuous' as to challenge the generally accepted theory that women had apparently made no contribution to 'great art'.

In retrospect, however, I am painfully aware of the neglect.

After emigrating to Canada I spent the next two decades fulfilling the traditional role of housewife and mother with no serious involvement in art. Periods of discontent, sometimes to the point of deep depression, would result in enrolment in various art courses. I was frantically searching for a 'cure for what ailed me', sliding from one evasive pattern into another. I was often discouraged because my efforts were judged to be 'dabbling', 'pastime', 'hobby'. (I am willing to accept partial blame for my predicament — I had made no serious commitment. Commitment to what?) Art education had not changed very much in those twenty years, only the ranks of prominent male artists had swelled considerably! Still no role models for me, still no clear concept of what it was exactly that I wanted to emulate. Even women instructors made no effort to heighten my awareness. And yet, the percentage of female art students had always been astonishingly high considering the lack of identity, the struggle without female role models, the almost total isolation from emotional content in art. In her book *Through The Flower*, Judy Chicago points out how difficult it is, '... drawing from our experiences as women trying to articulate feelings for which there is no developed form of language.'

Slowly, with my involvement in other feminist issues, there came the realization that, *indeed*, women artists had always existed. For centuries! Beautiful, competent women whose struggles must have been overwhelming at times. What has been the cause for so little (or no) historical/institutional recognition of Women in Art? It may well have been caused by the detrimental effects of sex role stereotyping. Historically women's efforts have been negatively valued.

With my new awareness comes the hope for a Community of Women in Art where mutual understanding and support generates creative productivity. Instead of jealously fighting one another we must nourish and reaffirm one another.

To be involved with — and knowledgeable of — other women artists is giving me a source of identity and security.

To be familiar with as much literature as possible (or available) on the achievements of women in art is giving me a source of encouragement.

To be exposed to the work of women artists is giving me a source of pride!

I have come to realize that I can best articulate my feelings as a woman artist through fibre. There is a spiritual essence to the creation of a tapestry through the developing of an idea, the spinning, the dyeing, the weaving processes. This is my link with history. The building block for a new set of standards that has validity for me.