

# Sasha Hayman — Spinster Hag

Helen Vernans



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Sasha Hayman discute des symboles de la déesse dans ses oeuvres. Cette artiste utilise les fibres.

A calm yet powerful atmosphere is immediately felt upon entering Sasha Hayman's FibreMoon Studio located amid the bustle of downtown London.

During a recent visit to the studio I was drawn to a beautiful vibrantly coloured tapestry, 'Mother Earth as the Cheek of the Goddess'. I noticed in this piece, as in other works in progress, symbols of female power taking shape. Moon, earth, fire, flowers, plants, shells, trees, serpents, eggs, butterflies, and emerging buds, all are symbols of female energy, of birth, death and transformation. These are the recurring images in Sasha's work.

Helen: The symbols in your work are strong and upfront, How did they initially manifest in your work?

Sasha: I arrived almost accidentally to a sense of the Goddess. Several years ago I was reading a great deal of Fantasy Literature, some of which inspired my earlier work. I wove a body of tapestries based on the Welsh Mabinogian and became excited about Evangeline Walton's series *The Children of Llyr*. In these books the women are portrayed as strong and independent forces. I wanted to incorporate all the female images that were in these books in my tapestries. I strongly identified with these women, most particularly with Rhiannon. I felt compelled to work with these images for some reason but I didn't understand why until one day I came across *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves. I was captivated and overwhelmed by the discovery that I was working exclusively with images that throughout antiquity were sacred to the worship of the Great Goddess. It was exhilarating!

Helen: Is there a spiritual dimension in this for you?

Sasha: Yes — there are spiritual connections and political as well. I had been dissatisfied for a long time with my experience of organized religion in which the images of divinity are exclusively male. . . . God the Father, etc. Women have never had the experience, which is freely available to every male in this culture of having their full sexual identity affirmed as being in the image and likeness of God. My power was never affirmed as strong and creative . . . women were 'inferior' and 'dangerous'. By reclaiming my lost ancestral heritage I am being energized and am feeling freer to explore physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual centres within myself. These centres have lain dormant under centuries of patriarchal repression and censorship.

The celebration of the Great Goddess is a primal rejoicing in what Mary Daly calls Be-ing. It is rejoicing as a creative energy, as a sacred earth energy, as a transformative energy. I am sensing something of the meaning of my Be-ing and my energy/power. It is an affirmation of my womanself and it feels wonderful.

Helen: Your work entitled 'Willow Goddess Emerging through the Moon' is an example of birth imagery. Do you feel that this emphasis on women as birth givers will keep women in their traditional nurturant role, keeping the home fires burning?

Sasha: The symbol of the Goddess as life and birth power creates a mood which joyfully affirms the female body and its powers and processes. The moment when a woman gives birth is one of real power and should be celebrated as such. We have to overcome the stereotypes of pregnant women as powerless and dependent, of menstruant and menopausal women as hysterical. We have to recognize the blood bonds shared by women, to value birth as an expression of the ultimate life power and to return the birth process to the hands of women.

Helen: You have been schooled in a variety of art forms. Why do you choose fibre as the medium for your work?

Sasha: I love the qualities of fibre that ask to be touched, held, wrapped around our bodies. The technique that I use now is tapestry, and although people don't wear my work, one of my aspirations is to have it soften and humanize the environment in which it hangs. Working with fibre is a very sensuous experience. When I buy the fleece it still has the smell of sheep, fresh air and sunshine in it. Feeling the fleece run through my fingers, spinning it into yarn, the rhythm of the wheel helps me centre. It is very much a body/spirit experience . . . it is primal.

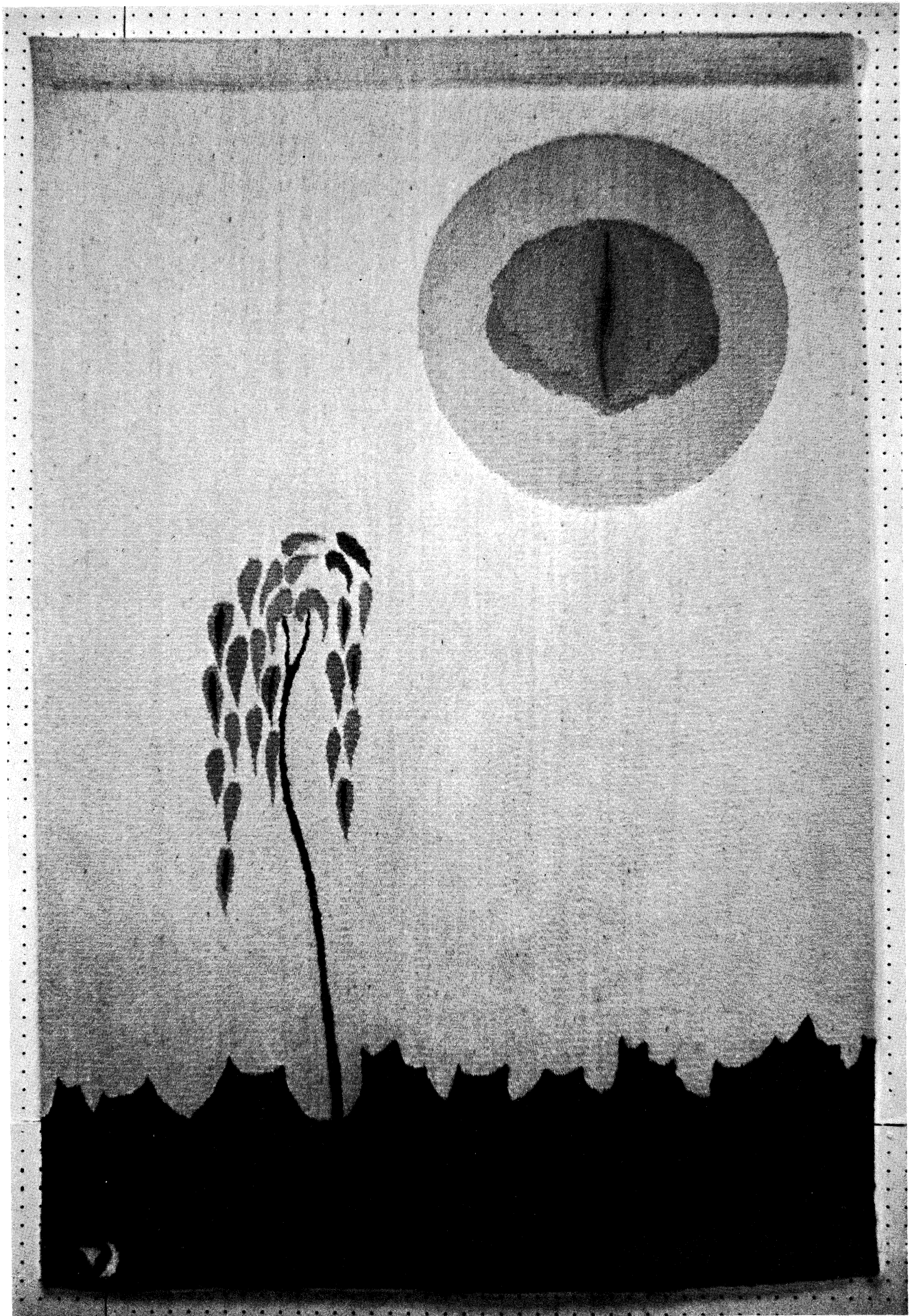
Helen: How long does it take to weave a tapestry?

Sasha: That depends on the size. 'Mother Earth as the Cheek of the Goddess' took 192 hours to weave. This does not include the many hours I spend planning, drawing, spinning and dyeing the wool.

Helen: What process do you go through in creating a tapestry?

Sasha: There are different processes. They depend on what or who the piece is for and also how I'm feeling at the time. The initial part of the process in a commissioned tapestry is to discuss the piece with the client. I like to find out something about the person and also assess the environment in which it is to be placed. Out of a blend of the client's needs, the space factors and my own needs to express myself comes the final piece. Most of my commissions come from women who are creating their own personal spaces and it feels wonderful to be able to contribute to what becomes a sanctuary for them. I see my tapestries as shields, demon chasers if you will.

Part of the process is drawing the design and deciding on colour. I love colour . . . I get body rushes when I'm dyeing the wool. I grew up in Peru where colour, bright, pulsating colour was everywhere . . . on people's bodies, in gardens, the desert, in homes. It was marvellous! Once the cartoon is drawn to scale, I tape it onto the frame and get to work. Weaving is magic. . . .



Sasha Hayman 'The Willow Goddess Emerging Through the Moon. 6' x 4', 1978.