

ANITA LUVERA MAYER

Weavers across the US know Anita Mayer's name from her writing: five books or monographs, and many articles in magazines such as *Handwoven* and *Weaver's*. During her 26 years of teaching, thousands have taken her workshops, seen her striking garments on display, or heard her lecture at conferences and seminars. Since Anita has been a WWG member from its early days, most of us have met her at some first-Thursday, and (this writer included!) have been heartened by her warm encouragement and her appreciation of others' work.

In fact, giving inspiration and support to other women is the mission of her teaching. She believes that the industrial revolution's 'liberation' of women from handicrafts such as weaving has deprived them of both a creative outlet and a means of self-definition. The making of textiles for the home and family is one way of balancing the needs of the family with the needs of the individual for self-definition and creative expression – a balancing act that has recently come to the world's attention because it is hardly achievable for today's Super moms.

With characteristic thoroughness, she arrived at these views through extensive readings of the journals of women in different countries and different epochs. Her studies of women's lives also led to her magnum opus: a series of six mantles, entitled *Mantles for Women: Rites of Passage* (1998). The individual mantles are "Menses," "Motherhood," "Menopause," "Matriarchal Crone," and "Celebration of Life and Death." Completed over five years, this collection is also perhaps the culmination of Anita's quarter-century of designing ethically inspired clothing, loom-shaped and often with rich surface embellishment. The dramatic mantles, which drew gasps when they were first shown at the 1996 Portland Convergence, have since been exhibited from Michigan to New Hampshire.

Her interest in such designs began in about 1970. Before that she wove 'straight' pieces – shawls, throws, scarves, pillows, which she sold in Northwest galleries. After Convergence '72, the making of clothing assumed a new meaning for her. She noticed that few of the weavers present were wearing handwoven clothes. She recalls, "We were all too afraid to. That night, I vowed to my journal that from that point on I would weave what I wore." The vow led to further realizations: "I found I could say who I was by weaving and wearing handwoven clothing. Someone once said that the making of art and the making of self are part of the same process. She was right. You can't weave for yourself until you know who you are." Anita's favorite path to self-knowledge and weaving design is in journaling, which she does without fail every day.

Anita is passionate about her art, and very articulate about how it comes to be. She is also passionate about the role of her art in her life. Recently she has written several articles about textiles she has created for the new house (a dream long in the planning) that she and husband Jack completed in 1996 on Islewood Pond, Fidalgo Island. Since Jack is now retired from his contracting company, and their three children are off leading their own lives, Anita and Jack are embarking on the next phase of their life. The design of the house is an architectural statement of their new phase and a celebration of it. Its central hallway, for example, is an elegant and perfectly lit gallery for the artworks that they have accumulated from local and regional shows, year by year. The reception area, which has a direct pass-through to a big working kitchen, is large and warm, it is dominated by a big dining table, overlaid with a rich cloth, with a grand piano and tall bookcases, but the sitting room is small, intimate, two-person sized. The house has one bedroom. This is the time in their lives when Anita and Jack are free to focus on their own interests: each has a large studio or study to pursue them. Because the process of art is a fundamental part of her everyday life, Anita insists on having a piece of her own

work in each room in the reception room, a drapery, which was inspired by the colors and textures of the pond outside the window, in the kitchen, potholders, in the sitting room, cushions.

One thing Anita says forthrightly: "I have been privileged in that I have never had to earn a living while pursuing my artistic goals. That has given me great freedom." Perhaps from that freedom, her style has evolved uniquely, not only in designing clothing, but in such areas as non-woven fabrics – notably her 'sandwich' cloth that captures snippets of multi-colored silks between layers of georgette, offering an enormous range of color effects along with soft and elegant drape. With little formal training, she has learned from workshops and other artists, from extensive reading and experimenting, and from travel to India, to China, to Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, always gathering ideas and samples. Some forty years into her career, she is still a student, and has recently enrolled in Part 2 of the City and Guilds Embroidery Program.

She has used her freedom with energy, honesty, and joy, along with the discipline of consistent application and daily journaling. The walls of her studio are crowded with art pieces, sample pieces, souvenirs of travels abroad, all inspirations and sources. She loves to be crowded with rich associations. There is passion and enthusiasm and plenty – so that one tends to overlook the excellent planning in the layout of equipment, as it is easy to overlook the rigor of working virtually every day that she does not teach. Rich as it is, this is dedicated existence.

Given her views on weaving and women's lives, it seems appropriate that Anita came to this existence through her mother-in-law, who was Marcelle Mayer, a noted Seattle weaving teacher. For a wedding present in 1955, Marcelle gave her new daughter-in-law a 36-inch loom and weaving lessons. Anita was born and raised in Anacortes where her father emigrated from Italy. Her mother's family homesteaded on Sinclair Island upon their arrival from Yugoslavia. Although her parents had limited formal education, they raised their three children to believe that one can achieve almost anything if you want it badly enough and are willing to work hard. Anita's mother taught her embroidery when she was seven, beading when she was twelve. The exploration of the hand arts continues in her work today.

---- Shirley Owen - 2000