



DOROTHY RUDDICK

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A Decade in Fiber, 1973-1983

November 14, 2020 – January 31, 2021

THE DRAWING ROOM

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Front cover: *Buttonhole*, wool and cotton thread on linen, 21 x 22 inches

Dorothy Ruddick remarks at The Cleveland Museum of Art's 1993 exhibition
Small Works in Fiber: The Mildred Constantine Collection

My art education with Josef Albers at Black Mountain College followed two years in art history at Radcliffe. All of my subsequent work was in painting and drawing, and I certainly thought of myself and exhibited as a 'painter'. I use quotation marks to emphasize, in advance, a later temporary concern with labels 'art' and 'craft'.

In the mid-70s crow-quill pen juxtaposed with sweeping washes on paper were my vehicle. The work was concerned with abstracted studies of sky, done in wash along with a horizontal band of intense black ... done with dense and intricate line, in pen.

I had been taught embroidery as a child. It had left my mind, and had been put in a pigeonhole outside of myself, neatly labeled 'for guest towels, table-cloths, and polite ladies'. But during the wash-and-pen period, [when I wasn't working] I began to do embroidery to entertain myself.

What happened soon became an obsession, and I stopped painting. If one dramatically enlarged a stitch, it could cast a shadow! What if one repeated a stitch and used it to entrap a raised surface? If one juxtaposed huge and small, rough and smooth, full space and empty space, then scale itself could be explored in a way I'd never discovered in painting, and could do what Mildred Constantine in her catalogue introduction for this exhibition calls 'the monumental in small scale'.

So I began. The first transmutation in thread, as against previous works, was that the wash skies, although Baroque, had been subtle and airy. In thread, because of its incredible richness, I wasn't interested in making airy space, but an almost claustrophobic denseness concentrated in part of the rectangle, with a spare surface on which it could float. And as for Baroque, it became my middle name.

I experimented with enlarged stitches, and with manipulating the thread in what I considered to be unique and exciting ways, only to discover at the Victoria and Albert [Museum] that my invention had been developed at least 400 years ago in Yugoslavia. Which told me the most moving thing of all, namely that there is a majestic simplicity and sparseness in the fact that a sharp object with a hole in it pulling a piece of string through cloth, has exquisitely endless limits.

However: with my new medium came a worry, which, sad to say, is cultural. The hierarchical madness of art versus craft affected me for a little while, once I found myself deeply committed to my new bed-fellow whom some would think had come from the wrong side of the tracks. But on seeing, at just the right moment, an overwhelming exhibition of early French tapestry at The Metropolitan [Museum of Art], I left it knowing that no hierarchy exists. Bronze isn't oil, but we call it sculpture, not craft. Thread isn't ink or oil, and only an idiot would denigrate it.



Untitled (T.034), c. 1981-83, cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen, 10 ½ x 13 ½ inches

Later, after having gone all-out with my love of richness and density in what Rudyard Kipling in *The Just-So Stories* calls 'more than Oriental splendor', I began to lean towards the somewhat spare, and to a palette of ivories and greys, in the Albersian belief that within strictly set limits, a more muted but equally powerful territory can be explored. The earlier richness was simmered down, and Bernini rested.

I also realized how much like drawing certain stitches can become, and that it would be interesting to combine the wet of ink and brush, with the dry of thread, and that there would be a certain visual irony in portraying cloth with thread. Drapery became, and is still, my chosen image.



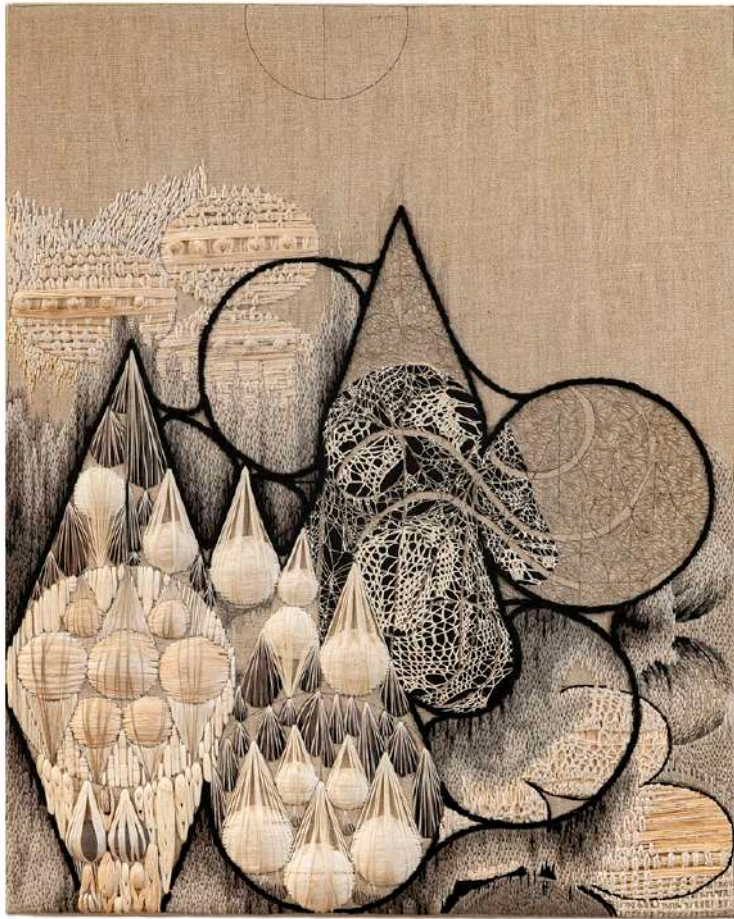
Untitled (T.051), c. 1973-74
wool on linen
20 x 16 inches



Untitled (T.044), c. 1973
wool, cotton & silk thread on linen
12 inches (diameter)



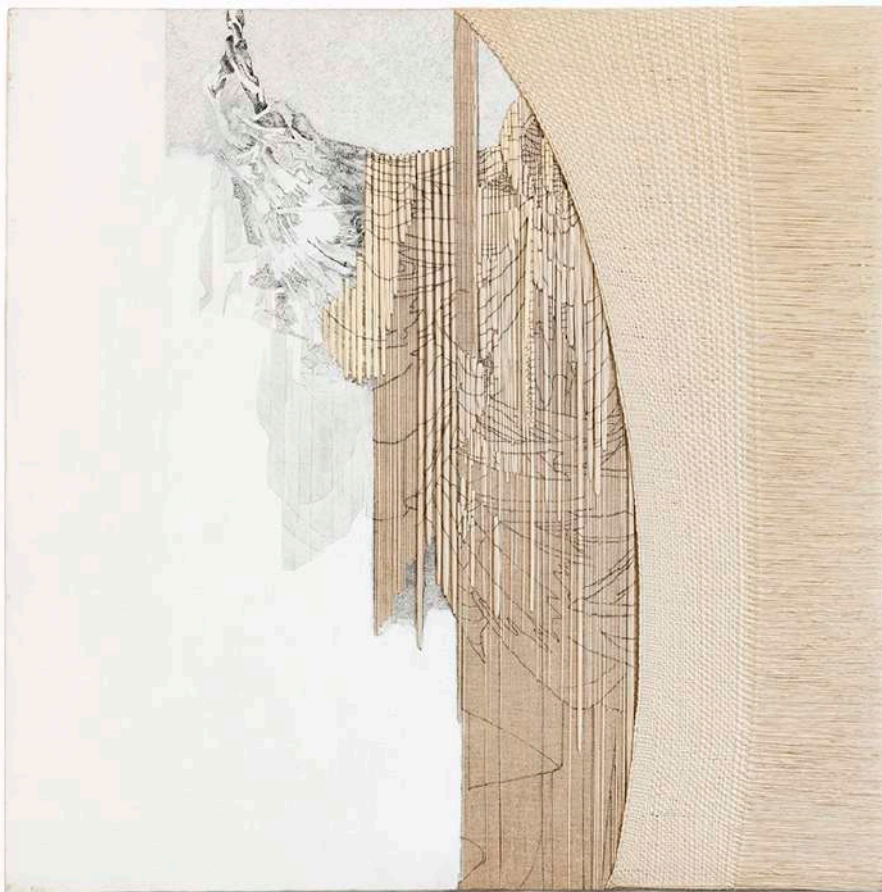
Untitled (T.040), c. 1977
wool, cotton & silk thread on linen
8 ½ x 9 x 2 inches



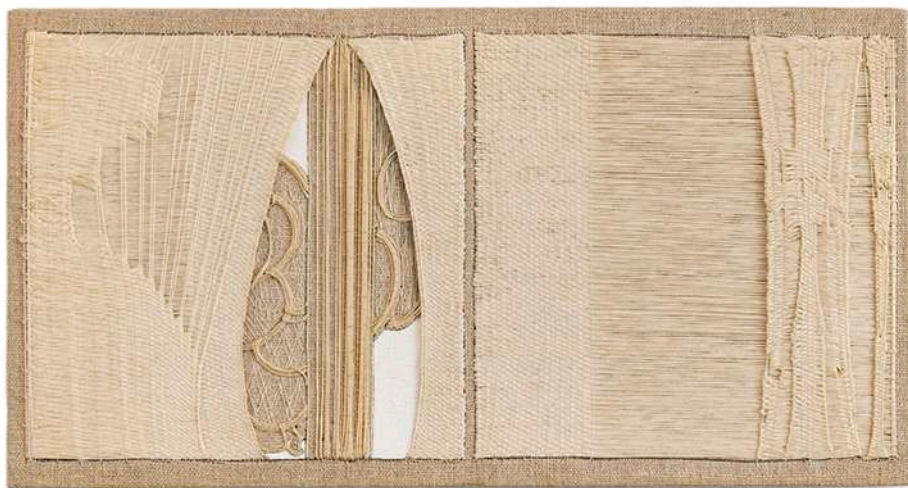
Untitled (T.052), c. 1975-78
wool, cotton & silk thread and ink on linen
23 3/8 x 18 3/4 inches



Untitled (T.014), 1981
cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen
27 x 27 inches



Untitled (T.010), 1981
cotton thread, ink, watercolor and gesso on linen
27 x 27 inches



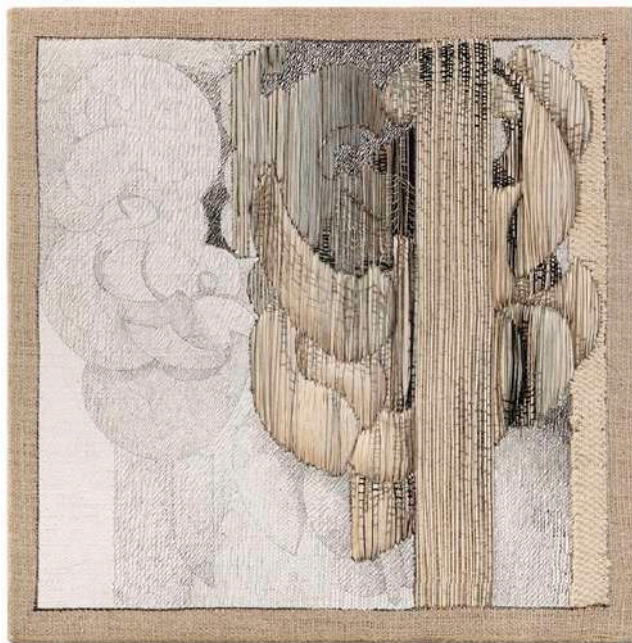
Untitled (T.008), c. 1981
cotton & linen thread with gesso on linen
9 x 17 inches



Untitled (T.033), 1982
cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen
17 x 16 inches



Untitled (T.031), 1982
cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen
17 x 32 inches



Untitled (T.047), c. 1981-82
cotton & silk thread, ink and gesso on linen
9 x 9 inches



Untitled (T.049), 1983
thread, ink and gesso on linen
14 x 12 inches



Untitled (T.009), 1983
thread, ink, watercolor and gesso on linen
27 x 27 inches



Untitled (T.035), c. 1981-83
cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen
11 x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

DOROTHY RUDDICK [1925 – 2010]

Education

Radcliffe College
Black Mountain College

Solo Exhibitions

- 2020 The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
- 2003 Richard York Gallery, New York, NY
- 2001 Steven Harris Architects, New York, NY
- 1995 Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Montreal, Canada
- 1994 Galerie l'Actuelle, Montreal, Canada
- 1993 Condeso/Lawler, New York, NY
Elaine Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton, NY
- 1991 Condeso/Lawler, New York, NY
- 1984 Elaine Benson Galley, Bridgehampton, NY
- 1982 Louise Himmelfarb Gallery, Southampton, NY
Graham Gallery, New York, NY
- 1981 Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA
- 1980 Graham Gallery, New York, NY
- 1976 Fischbach Gallery, New York, NY
- 1974 Graham Gallery, New York, NY
- 1972 Graham Gallery, New York, NY
- 1971 Graham Gallery, New York, NY
- 1965 Weyhe Gallery, New York, NY
- 1963 Weyhe Gallery, New York, NY
- 1961 Weyhe Gallery, New York, NY
- 1958 Robert Isaacson Gallery, New York, NY
- 1957 Hewitt Gallery, New York, NY
- 1955 Galerie Agnes Lefort, Montreal, Canada

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2018 Florence County Museum, Florence, SC
- 2011 Bard Graduate Center Gallery, New York, NY
- 1998 Jason McCoy Gallery, New York, NY
- 1996 Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY
- 1995 YWCA, Montreal, Canada
- 1993 The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
- 1989 The Art Institute of Chicago, IL
- 1984 BFM Gallery, Phillip Daniel, New York, NY
- 1981 The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Louise Himmelfarb Gallery, Southampton, NY
- 1980 Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY
Springs Annual Exhibition, Springs, NY
Graham Gallery, New York, NY
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- 1979 Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY
- 1977 Se Biennale Internationale de la Tapiserie, Lausanne, Switzerland and the
Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal
Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. and The
Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York, NY
Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, PA
Mackler Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1976 Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA
- 1975 Artist's Auction, Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY
- 1972 Randolph-Macon Women's College, Lynchburg, VA
- 1971 Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul, MN
American Academy of Arts and Letters
- 1969 American Academy of Arts and Letters
- 1968 Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 1967 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 1963 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
- 1951 Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Selected Permanent Collections

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
Columbia University, New York, NY
New York University, New York, NY
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, NY
Black Mountain College Museum, Asheville, NC
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
The Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York, NY
Maier Museum of Art, Lynchburg, VA
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI

Awards and Grants

1973 Hassam, Speicher, Betts, and Symons Purchase Fund from the
Academy of Arts & Letters
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