

# TSGNY: 40 YEARS & COUNTING

BY PATRICIA MALARCHER

**THE 1970S WERE A SEMINAL TIME FOR THE BURGEONING FIELD OF CONTEMPORARY TEXTILES.**

Experimental approaches to fiber structures proliferated in academic art departments as well as in non-accredited programs throughout the US. That energetic period also inspired artists working in fibrous materials to form collectives for sharing information, meeting peers with mutual interests, and creating opportunities for further learning. One such group that continues to flourish, the Textile Study Group of New York (TSGNY), is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

From a cluster of six weavers, TSGNY has grown into a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to spreading knowledge and awareness of textile art. Its members—last count, 225—are mostly from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut; a significant few reside in distant states and countries. TSGNY offers members monthly presentations



by prominent artists and other textile professionals, exposure for artwork through exhibitions and an online gallery, excursions to art and design studios, and an e-newsletter with up-to-date listings of textile-related events. A 40th Anniversary catalog documenting members' work and the group's history is under way.

Nancy Koenigsberg, a founding member and past president who

continues to play an active role in advising TSGNY activities, recalls how former students from The New School gathered in each other's homes after their instructor, Gayle Wimmer, left New York to teach at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

"Gayle said we'd had enough classes but should get together to critique work and give each other support," Koenigsberg recalls. The founders weren't thinking "organization" at

first, but eventually felt the need to reach beyond themselves. As the "Textile Study Group," they scheduled regular meetings with speakers and invited others with similar interests to join them.

Among the first to address the group was Junius Bird, Curator of Archaeology at the American Museum of Natural History, discussing the extraordinary textiles in which Andean mummies were bundled and buried. Other outstanding speakers have included textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen, renowned weaver Sheila Hicks, MoMA curator Mildred Constantine, fiber sculptors Do Ho Suh and Sheila Pepe, quilt artist Michael James, and art critic Janet Koplos.

Central to TSGNY's survival has been its resourcefulness and adaptability in order to keep moving forward. When membership outgrew the biggest living room available, the group moved to larger, non-residential spaces. Following

a nomadic sequence of short-term tenancies at such venues as a tapestry studio/school, a museum, a poetry center, and artist-run galleries, TSGNY has enjoyed a decade of stability located at the Community Church of New York.

Initially, the organizational structure was casual, with an ad hoc president and a volunteer treasurer collecting and banking annual dues. An opportunity to organize a juried exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), a project that required more funds than dues could cover, marked another critical juncture: the decision to apply for incorporation, finalized in 2001.

After its tenure at MAD, *9 x 9 x 3* (the show title reflects the size of artworks in identical boxes) toured



OPPOSITE PAGE  
TOP: Chunghie Lee (right), Director of the Korea Bojagi Forum 2016, leads a tour past *RED*, the TSGNY members' exhibition. TSGNY members also showed at KBF 2018 in Seoul, South Korea, their exhibition titled *RED PLUS ONE*.

BOTTOM: TSGNY president Kim Svoboda in front of her work.

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TOP RIGHT: TSGNY members get up a close-up view of rare textiles at the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

CENTER: Nancy Koenigsberg (left) and Pat Hickman (center) welcome Dorothy Gill Barnes before her unforgettable presentation.

BOTTOM: Sula Bermudez-Silverman, winner of the 2018 Harry and Nancy Koenigsberg Student Award (June 2018).

around the US. Periodic juried and non-juried shows followed at galleries and alternative spaces including the prestigious World Financial Center in Manhattan. Chunghie Lee, director of the Korea Bojagi Forum, invited TSGNY to exhibit in Seoul during the 2016 and 2018 forums and at the Chojun Textile and Quilt Art Museum. For some, exhibition opportunities were the incentive to join.

An obvious advantage for the group is being able to draw from the New York area's rich resources to find speakers as well as informal encounters with established artists and designers. Small groups recently visited the studios of tapestry artist Helena Hernmarck and Gabriel Asfour, a visionary clothing designer. Another group visited the Antonio Ratti Textile Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Expertise within the membership is now being tapped at pre-meeting sessions on practical matters like shipping and marketing.

Even with increasing activities like these, TSGNY retains its commitment to education. The Nancy and Harry Koenigsberg Student Award, supported by



members, is given triennially to a promising graduate from an institution in the Northeast. The 2018 recipient, Sula Bermudez-Silverman, earned her MFA at the Yale School of Art.

Early on, potential members learned of TSGNY by word of mouth. Now, people discover the organization through its website, *TSGNY.org*. The power of the search engine has yielded a medley of textile artists.

"I was looking for an organization that represented the diversity of textiles, not a specific discipline," Kim Svoboda, the current president, says. TSGNY includes weavers, stitchers, basketmakers, book artists, quilters, felters, dyers, lacemakers,

papermakers, knitters, knotters, and crocheters, as well as curators, textile historians, writers, and collectors. Whether they are full-time professionals, artists seeking their next level, new art graduates, mid-life career changers, or simply fiber art lovers, all are welcomed.

*Patricia Malarcher*, an independent writer and former editor of the *Surface Design Journal*, has contributed chapters to several books including *Rooted, Revived, Reinvented: Basketry in America*. As a Renwick Fellow at the Smithsonian Institution, she researched critical responses to fiber and other material-based art disciplines. A studio artist who has exhibited throughout the US and internationally, she is represented in museum and corporate collections.

