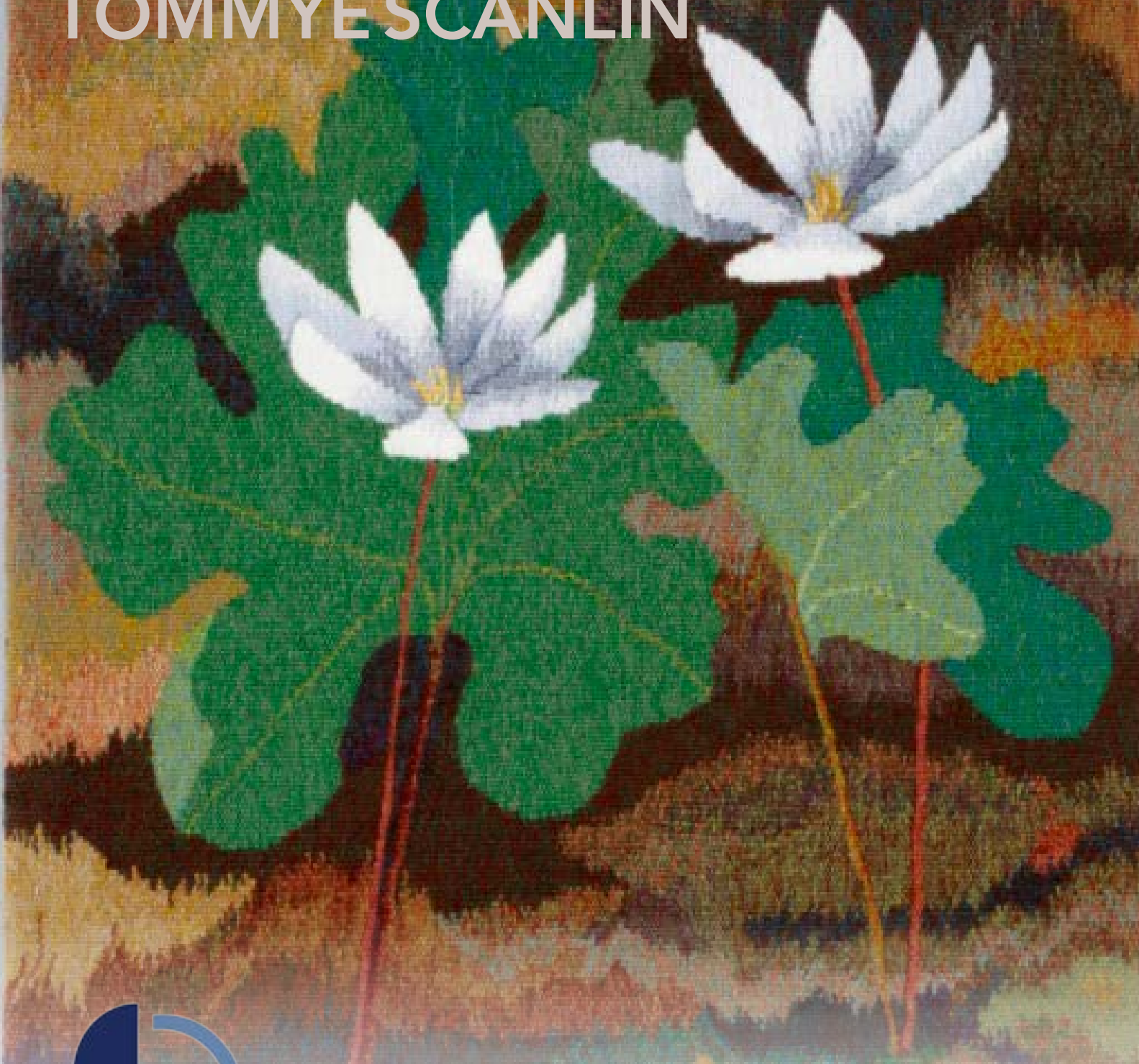


# Meet TOMMYE SCANLIN



THE QUARTERLY



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# TOMMYE SCANLIN: INTERVIEW

## 1. What is your connection with the University of North Georgia?

In the fall of 1965, I entered North Georgia College as a freshman. I stayed for two years and in that time took several classes from Bob Owens. Although there wasn't an art degree program at NGC then, Owens was teaching art education and a few studio classes. Because I wanted to study art, with his advice and encouragement I applied to the University of Georgia as an art education major. Upon graduation from UGA in 1969 I started teaching art in Gainesville, Georgia. I'd stayed in contact with Bob Owens when I was at UGA and also when teaching in Gainesville. Owens had been working on the formation of the Department of Fine Arts for several years and was able to gain approval for the department in 1971. At that time he hired Win Crannell and in 1972 he invited me to become an instructor of art education at NGC, and I joined Bob Owens and Win Crannell as part of the initial visual art faculty. One of the things Bob Owens wanted me to do when I was hired at NGC was to build a fiber art program to include textile design and weaving--and I did that. The textiles and weaving courses remain part of the curriculum of the art department and I've very proud of that fact. In addition to the art education and textiles/weaving classes I taught at North Georgia I also was responsible for the color theory design class and a basic craft design class, and watercolor painting. Occasionally I taught a non-Western art history course. My years at North Georgia span from 1972 to 2000 as a full-time faculty member. In 1997 I was appointed head of the Fine Arts Department upon the retirement of Bob Owens. I remained head of the department until 2000 when I retired from full time and was appointed Professor Emerita. I continued to teach the weaving classes at UNG as a part-time instructor until 2009.

## 2. What's your background?

My family is from the north Georgia area and I grew up in Union County. As I mentioned, I entered NGC in 1965 with a desire to study art, although there had been no art classes in the public school I attended. In addition to the BS in Art Education from the University of Georgia from 1969, I completed a Master of Art Education from UGA in the summer of 1973 when I was an instructor at NGC. I began an MFA program at East Tennessee State University in 1976 so that I would have the required terminal degree to be eligible for tenure and promotion beyond instructor. I was granted a leave of absence from NGC in 1979-1980 to complete the MFA.

## 3. What media do you prefer and how did you come to use it as your primary one?

My medium of choice is handwoven tapestry. The studio courses in my university studies were in drawing, painting, and printmaking so image making has always been part of my artistic life. However, when I began weaving in the early 1970s I became fascinated with the process of designing and constructing fabric from individual threads. Once I learned tapestry technique in the late 1980s I realized that it offered a way to combine my desire for image-making with the intricacy of a process that I so enjoyed with weaving.

## 4. When did you first become interested in art?

I became interested in art in childhood. Even though there were no art classes in the primary or high school I attended I was often thought of as the "class artist"--the one who had pages and pages filled with drawings of horses. In high school, I became interested in doing portraits of friends. In my first art class with Bob Owens in 1967 at NGC, I began to definitely broaden my subject matter when he assigned various themes for weekly sketchbooks!

## 5. What does your work aim to say?

I have no particular statement that I strive for in my work--other than to make tapestries that celebrate the details of the natural world. I try to capture some of the essences of the colors and shapes I find in the small things around me and explore those as I design and make tapestries.

## 6. How does your work comment on current social or political issues?

Not currently. However, several years ago, after my brother-in-law died as a result of Agent Orange exposure when he was a U.S. Army Ranger in the Vietnam conflict I made a body of work that dealt with the wartime use of the herbicide and its sad result on all living things--human, animal, and plant.

## 7. Who are your biggest influences?

Bob Owens was a major influence on my life and career. He was my first art teacher and with his encouragement, I found my way to a long and productive career as an artist and art teacher. Other influences have been Edwina Bringle with whom I studied weaving at Penland School of Craft in the mid-1970s. Her advice and guidance steered me on paths that I might have not found on my own. In tapestry, Archie Brennan and Susan Martin Maffei were mentors. In the art world, I find inspiration in the work of Alex Katz, Georgia O'Keefe, Charles Burchfield.

## 8. How have you developed your career?

My career in art teaching began within a few months after graduation from UGA. I was fortunate to be able to come to North Georgia to be part of the beginnings of the visual arts and to stay there for the next twenty-eight years. I began to teach workshops at John C. Campbell Folk School, Penland School of Craft, and for weaving guilds in the summers several decades ago. Once I retired from full-time employment at North Georgia I've been able to continue those workshops and have taught three or four annually since then.

## 8. How do you seek out opportunities?

Take advantage of opportunities when they're offered. And try to seek those out. Build the network you want to have by finding like-minded people. Join organizations that are related to the medium you are working in (or want to be working in). Get involved with committee work, enter juried exhibits, travel to see art shows. With social media find individuals who are working in the same mediums you want to and see what others are doing.

## 9. How do you cultivate a collector base?

I have not sold work for many years so I can't comment about the collector base.

## 10. How do you navigate the art world?

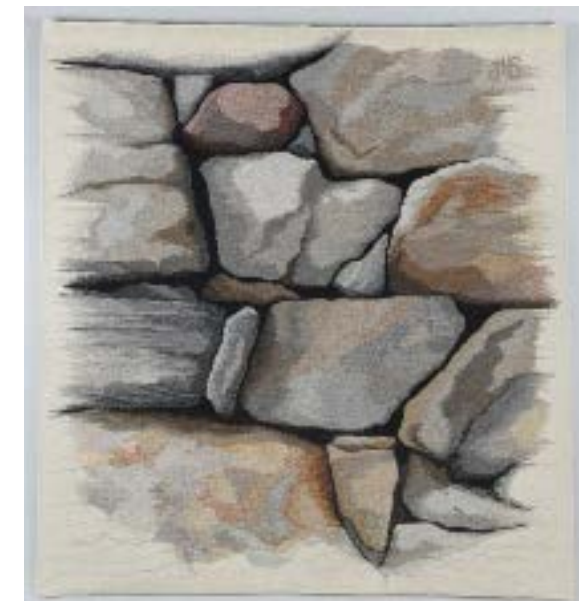
My medium of handwoven tapestry has its own group of makers and collectors. I have mainly stayed within this more closed group so I can't comment about "navigating the art world." Within these more narrow fields, I attend conferences and keep abreast of current publications.

## 11. Which current art world trends are you following?

I follow what's happening among the tapestry and fiber art makers. I can't say that the "art world trends" are ones that those engaged in "slow art" like I am are applicable.

## 12. How do you speak to the ways art is important to society?

Art makers, creative thinkers, those who see and respond to life in visual ways are just as important as those who are engaged in any other field. Encouraging those who feel the desire to making images in whatever medium they choose should be an acceptable part of society.



You can find more of Tommye Scanlin's on her [website](#). Also, check out her locally published books on the medium of tapestry. [The Nature of Things: Essays of a Tapestry Weaver](#) and [Tapestry Design Basics and Beyond: Planning and Weaving with Confidence](#)



# ART GALLERY EVENTS

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Come see Joseph Kameen's exhibition at the Bob Owen's art gallery on the Dahlonega campus going on now until November 30th.