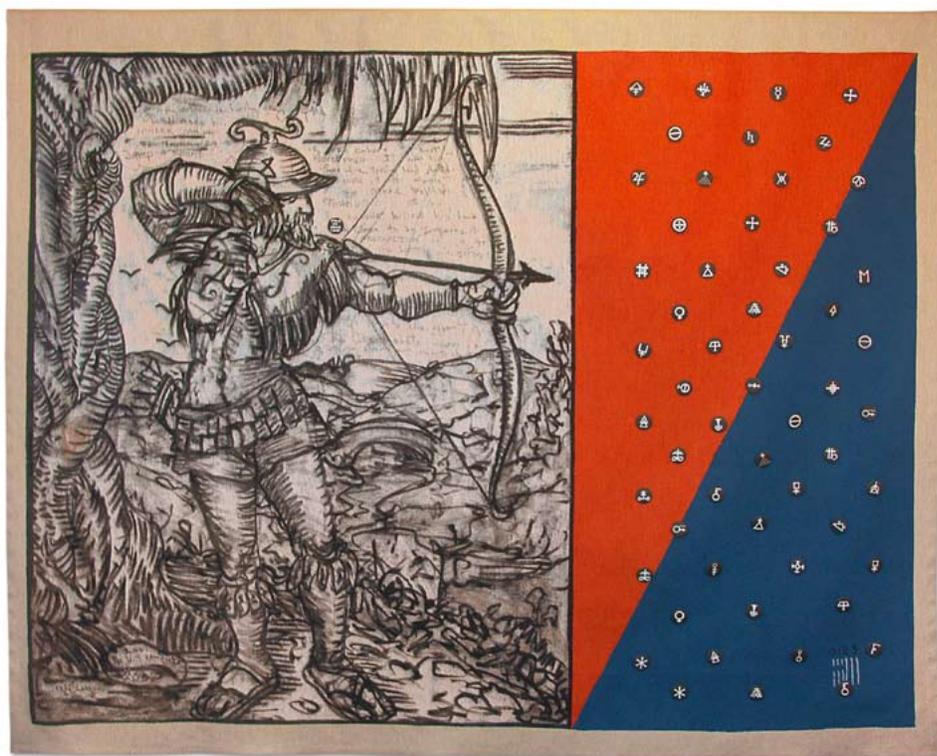


# William Wiley: *The U.S. Artsure*

In 2002, Magnolia Editions teamed with genre-busting maverick and California legend William Wiley to produce an ongoing series of editioned Jacquard tapestries. Accomplished in various media, Wiley is principally known for paintings and drawings that mingle surreal imagery with sly and often hilarious bursts of text. He shifts gears in a heartbeat: one moment finds him lampooning the pompous, cruel machines of power, while the next sees him celebrating the harmonious reverie of existence. Elsewhere, an introspective Wiley reflects on the process of art-making, inspiration and creativity. *The U.S. Artsure*, his first tapestry, seems to fall into this latter category: its enigmatic protagonist might be interpreted as an avatar of the human impulse to use symbols, science and myth to define the universe.

In *Artsure*, as in much of Wiley's recent work, abstract fields of bright color contrast with figurative black-and-white passages. The two 'worlds' evoked by these different methods suggest a divergence between a realm of logic, order and mimesis and a more intuitive, jubilant realm of imagination. *Artsure's* left-hand section contains a figurative, black-and-white image of an archer, surrounded by text and wilderness. The archer's arrow aims at the right-hand section, inhabited by a pair of colored triangles. Wiley based the the figurative section on an image from a book of medieval woodcuts, adding signature flourishes like the musical f-holes on the figure's breastplate. The archer's



*The U.S. Artsure*, 2002/2006 - Jacquard tapestry w/ archival rag & pigment buttons, 82 x 104 in., Ed: 6.

target emerged in three dimensions when Wiley pinned archival buttons he created at Magnolia Editions to the work's surface in 2006. The buttons on the abstract right-hand side bear alchemical symbols; one near the archer's head reads: *Which One Should I Pick?*

The tapestry's clarity belies its construction: from a distance, one might never guess that Wiley's singular "scribbly tendrilly graffiti-like line," as John Perreault calls it, is woven into the fabric and not drawn on its surface. In a 2005 interview, Wiley commented that the transformation of his mixed-media composition into tapestry was akin to a translation from English into a language such as Japanese. It is a fitting analogy: as in a linguistic translation, the end product

possesses a unique poetics, wholly separate from its source and acquired only via the alchemy of translation.

## *The Magnolia Tapestry Project:*

The Magnolia Tapestry Project originated in artist John Nava's commission to decorate the vast interior walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, which required a consideration of the acoustical demands of the space: the decorative element was to function practically by reducing unwanted reverberation, prompting an inquiry into the use of textiles. Nava and Magnolia Editions co-director Donald Farnsworth subsequently collaborated



The artist arranges buttons on *The U.S. Artsure* at Magnolia Editions in 2006 (Photo by Donald Farnsworth).

on a series of woven experiments which grew into an unorthodox approach to Jacquard weaving. Using this approach, contemporary artists work with either Nava or Farnsworth to translate compositions into digital “weave files” using custom calibrated color palettes developed at Magnolia Editions. Each completed weave file is then woven in Belgium on a double-headed Jacquard loom, where 17,800 available warp threads generate colors of unprecedented variety and density.

In the same way that Tamarind and Gemini put the commercial lithographic technology of the 19th century into the hands of fine artists in the fifties and sixties, the Magnolia Tapestry Project is putting the electronic Jacquard

loom to work in unexpected ways for today’s artists. The Project includes tapestries representative of several generations and numerous art movements: the abstract wizardry of Ed Moses; the formally rigorous portraits of Chuck Close; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; the hyper-realism of Alan Magee and Guy Diehl; the playful poetics of Squeak Carnwath; the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner, and the Abstract Expressionist topographies of George Miyasaki are all re-envisioned in striking new editions. The Magnolia Tapestry Project has also produced tapestries by Mel Ramos, Rupert Garcia, Lewis deSoto, Donald and Era Farnsworth, Lia Cooke, Diane Andrews Hall, Gus Heinze, Robert Kushner, John Nava, Nancy Spero, Katherine Westerhout and others. ■