**About the curator of Woven By Hand:**

Thoma Ewen’s connection to art began in the children’s art classes at the Vancouver Art Gallery. When her family moved to Ottawa, she studied with Ottawa artist Eva Jaworska. Treasured memories are of digging clay on the banks of the lake at Eva’s cottage near Wakefield, Quebec, and then making pottery in Eva’s Ottawa studio, where there were weaving looms and baskets of yarns. Thus began a love of the crafts, and a heart connection to the Gatineau Hills.

Regular visits to the National Gallery of Canada familiarized her with Canadian Art and the Group of Seven, and inspired her creativity. In 1968, a touring exhibition of French tapestries, featuring works by renowned tapestry artist Jean Lurçat, was presented in the foyer of Ottawa City Hall. That exhibition had such a strong visual impact that Thoma knew immediately that she wanted to become a tapestry artist.

Following a BFA from the University of Victoria in 1971, Thoma received a graduate scholarship to apprentice with Finnish tapestry artist Oili Mäki, and to study drawing at Ateneum, the Graduate Institute of Fine Art in Helsinki. That experience provided the basis for a lifelong studio practice in the art and craft of tapestry weaving.

Thoma was invited to exhibit in *Crossroads*, the opening exhibition of the Ontario Crafts Council Gallery in 1976 in Toronto. In 1980-81 she attended the Banff Centre’s Winter Cycle, in residence in the Fibre Studio under the direction of Quebec tapestry artist Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, where the dynamic textile artists and the ideas of the international fibre art community were converging. Deeply inspired, Thoma founded *Tapestry Makers* in Toronto in the mid-80’s and coordinated tapestry exhibitions in the Toronto area. In collaboration with the Ontario Crafts Council and *Convergence 86*, the biennial conference of the Handweavers Guild of America, she coordinated *Tapestry Canada*, and *Homage to Lurcat,* the first USA/Canada tapestry exhibition, curated by the American Tapestry Alliance’s Jim Brown.

In 1993, during its inaugural year, the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum invited Thoma to present a solo exhibition of her tapestries. Then in 2004, retiring MVTM curator Mary Lettner invited Thoma to present her tapestries as Lettner’s final exhibition. She has exhibited in *Woven Bridges* at MVTM, curated by Krystyna Sadej, and has collaborated with Michael Rickley Lancaster coordinating exhibitions as part of *La Triennale Internationale des Arts Textiles.*

In 1999, she co-founded Moon Rain Centre, an artist-run textile arts centre with daughter and textile artist Gabby Ewen. Moon Rain Centre is dedicated to interweaving textile art and community. Its profoundly moving community tapestry projects, like *The Vision Weave Project*, bring together members of the public to collaboratively co-create textile art that expresses a vision for the future of the Earth. Moon Rain Centre organized *La Triennale Internationale des Arts Textiles en Outaouais*, an international textile arts event in the National Capital Region that made textile art visible and accepted as contemporary art.

Over the past 50 years, Thoma has exhibited in solo and group tapestry exhibitions in Canada, United States, Mexico, England, Ireland, France, Poland, Guatemala, Venezuela and China. Her tapestries are in numerous public and private collections. She is the author of *The Living Tapestry Workbook* and *La Tapisserie Vivante,* beginner guides to designing and weaving tapestry.

Inspired by ancient indigenous weaving wisdom, Thoma communicates the vital contemporary role of tapestry today: to transmit the energy of peace. She continues to design and weave tapestries, working from her studio at Moon Rain Centre, located in the Gatineau Hills, north of Ottawa.