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Art: Luxury or Truth?

*Emilie De Angelis '97
weighs in on the value
of art in our society*

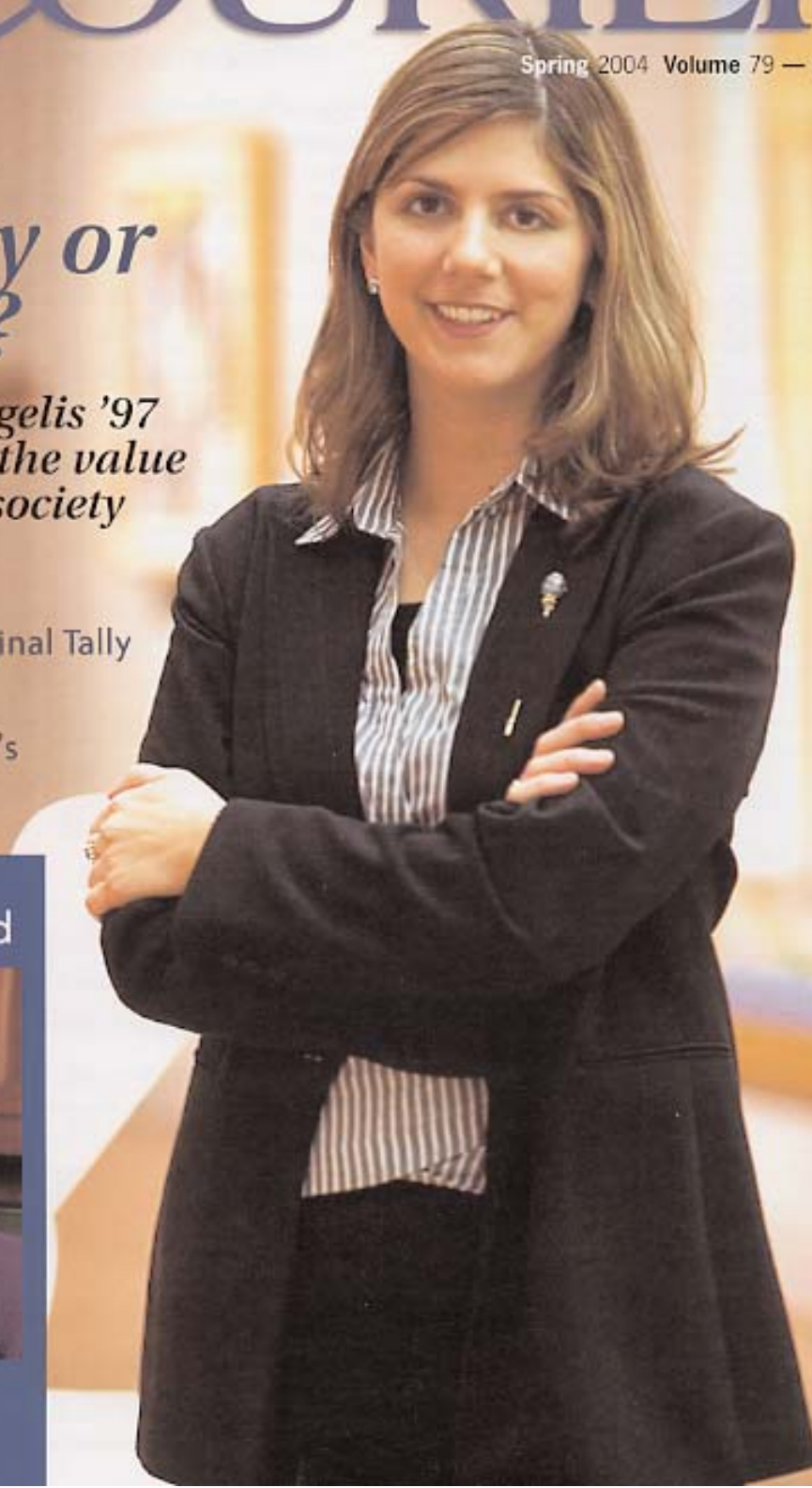
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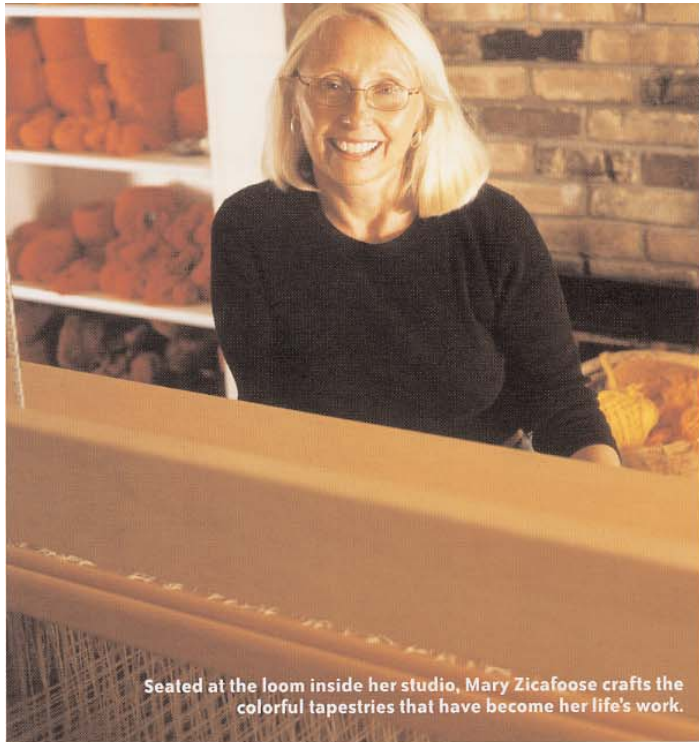
- Lilly Challenge Final Tally
- Weaving a Life
- Meet Saint Mary's
Next President

President
Marilou Eldred



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Kirby Zicafoose

Seated at the loom inside her studio, Mary Zicafoose crafts the colorful tapestries that have become her life's work.

Mary Breowski Zicafoose '73

Weaving a Life

by Suzanne Smith Arney

As the late Sister M. Rose Ellen Morrissey, former chair of the art department, reviewed Mary Breowski Zicafoose's design portfolio she recalls Morrissey saying, "These are rug designs!" Dumbfounded, Zicafoose filed the comment away until years later.

After graduating from Saint Mary's with a bachelor in fine arts, she did her post-graduate work in clay at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Nebraska. Her functional and beautiful tableware led to a desire to work with cloth; from the moment she sat at a loom she recognized with absolute clarity that she was a weaver. As Zicafoose's interest and skill in weaving deepened, so did her sense of its power as a medium of memory and culture across time and place. Through twenty years of work, she honors ancient connections of textile, spirituality and women.

Titles or themes for her work are the first step in the process, and may appear in dreams or the most mundane activity. "I spend quite a bit of contemplative time before I begin a new body of work, asking such questions as: 'What needs to be said at this moment in time? What do I want to say? Are these mutually inclusive statements? How do I say this visually?' Designing is a receiving process. The more awake and open I can be, the deeper the visual language and possibilities."

Zicafoose has always been sensitive to the physical characteristics and cultural history of her environment. "My greatest inspiration is place," she said. However, just as she creates weavings with deft interconnections of woolen weft and linen warp, her designs are the result of personal experiences, exploration of archetypal symbols, the ancient thread of storytelling, and the power of

communication. After traveling the country and spending a year in a Bolivian rainforest, Zicafoose has settled in Omaha, Nebraska since 1996. She creates 14–20 full-size weavings a year from her home and always works in series, though each tapestry she creates is one-of-a-kind.

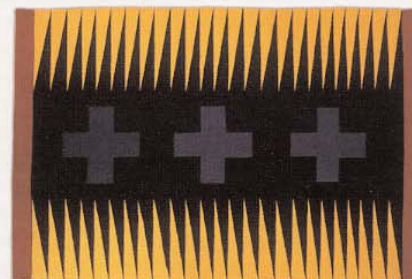
Zicafoose's tapestries hang in private homes, corporate collections, galleries, and exhibitions coast to coast. She has been profiled in magazines such as *The Smithsonian Magazine*; *Washington Post*; *Southwest Arts Magazine*; *Handwoven Magazine*; *Fiberarts Magazine*; and *Shuttle, Spindle, and Dyepot Magazine*.

In 1996, her tapestries were exhibited in The Smithsonian Craft Show. A curator from the State Department invited her to participate in the Art in Embassies Program, which provides original works of art by American artists for the residencies of U.S. ambassadors worldwide. Zicafoose's work has now been included in collections in Azerbaijan, Ghana, Lithuania, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Yemen, as well as the White House.

Most recently, Zicafoose was commissioned to create Nebraska's 2004 Governor's Arts Awards prizes. She came up with miniature, framed tapestries based on the theme *Fire House*. Her current endeavor, entitled *Out of Memory*, will include both tapestries and works on paper. The paired exhibitions will show at The Native American Trading Company and The Emil Nelson Gallery in Denver, June 25 through July 30, 2004, with the

opening to be held on July 2nd.

Returning to Saint Mary's in 1985 to direct the Summer Fine Arts Camp for Girls, and again in May 2000 as a guest instructor and juror in the art department, she was struck with the quality of instruction and the level of opportunity. "It's a very personal education," she said. Zicafoose carries forward the passionate teaching she benefited from at Saint Mary's, saying, "I use daily the artistic skills I honed and learned while at Saint



Cross Fire 2003, Hand-dyed wool on linen warp

Mary's. When I entered as a freshman, I was a creative young girl who had won some national poster contests, had many talents, but was quite unsure of what I wanted to become in life. I graduated as a young woman confident in knowing that the world was at my feet, and that not only did I have the 'right' to work as an artist, it was my path." □

Suzanne Smith Arney is a writer and arts educator living in Omaha, Nebraska.