



# Technology and the Touch of the Hand

**For mixed-media artist Miriam Wosk, transforming her works into tapestries and prints has brought unexpected—and welcome—surprises**

**B**ased in Santa Monica, California, artist Miriam Wosk's richly textured works combine such disparate materials as fragments of old paper, paint, metallic foils, jewels, wire and other found objects. In her mixed-media creations, these materials come together in complex, atmospheric compositions that celebrate nature and evoke a world of dreams. Some of her works are as large as murals. Buoyed by their vibrant colors and a joyful sense of life, they also suggest a heightened sense of time, mortality and the fragility of existence.

**Ricco/Maresca** is pleased to be introducing Wosk's multifaceted art, especially at a time when many collectors, curators, critics and artists themselves are expressing a growing sense of interest in the quality—and visibility—of craftsmanship in works of contemporary art.

Recently, Wosk spoke about her ideas and techniques with Edward Goldman, a Los Angeles-based art consultant whose “Art Talk” program is a popular feature on Santa Monica's KCRW radio station. Wosk described her first-ever experience seeing one of her mixed-media designs transformed into a limited edition tapestry. That edition of eight pieces was produced by Magnolia Editions, a fine-art print-making studio in Oakland, California, which is also involved in paper-making.

**Edward Goldman:** About your tapestry “Big Red”: John Nava, the artist, tapestry-maker and co-owner of Magnolia Editions, visited your studio and chose one of your mixed-media collages, featuring an image of a lobster and its parts, to make into a tapestry. The original image is about five feet by four feet large; the resulting tapestry measures about eight feet by five feet. It's a more mysterious and interesting artistic product than the work on which it is based. You used metallic thread that added some kind of inner glow to the piece,

and you added crystals, too. It's a combination of what technology allows you to achieve, plus your personal touch.

**Miriam Wosk:** I started with a collage made of tiny bits of vintage wallpapers, patterned papers and natural-history prints. The subject matter refers to nature, but what really intrigued me were these bits of patterns and the new patterns they might create, and also the interaction between the natural world and the ornamental world. It was like Antoni Gaudí's benches in his Parque Güell in Barcelona, where all these disparate fragments [of pique assiette tile] create a new whole.

**EG:** Why did you choose such an exotic image—that of the lobster? You've depicted serpents, spiders and insects before, but the lobster is such an unusual subject.

**MW:** I think a lobster is one of the most magnificent creatures on Earth, one of the oldest. It dates back to prehistoric times, and its form is almost extraterrestrial. I've long been attracted to the shapes of its shell, claws and body.

**EG:** Was it a challenge for you to transform your original image into another medium? What was required of you as an artist?



*Big Red* tapestry and beaded chair  
2007-8, jacquard tapestry with metallic threads and Swarovski crystals  
92 ins. x 65 1/2 ins.



*The Golden Serpent*, 2007-8, paper collage and painted metallic foils on canvas, 64 ins. x 118 ins.

**MW:** I've been looking for a way to do tapestries for years. In the past, I had had test swatches created by tapestry-makers who wove by hand, but none of them were able to recreate the detail of my work. However, in Magnolia Editions' process, an image is translated digitally. It goes onto the finest looms that recreate it, almost like pixels, bit by bit; each thread helps create the whole image, translating it into a tapestry. It pulls the whole thing together in this very rich, lustrous material.

**EG:** I believe they're using more differently colored threads than it has

ever been possible to use before. The most luxurious tapestries of the 17th and 18th centuries—fewer colors were available then. Now, with computer technology, [tapestry-makers can] reproduce the most delicate color combinations.

**MW:** I'm sure that's true. I livened mine up by including many metallic colors—gold, bronzes, peaches, silvers—because I wanted the whole thing to shimmer and shine. Then I gave it an extra, handmade touch of multicolored crystals, so each piece [in the edition of tapestries] is unique. The

beginning of the process [involved] translating the image into layers on the computer. The whole thing was done by e-mail, and each color became a layer. I had to imagine which colors might translate into the best threads in this process.

**EG:** Did you feel sure about this tapestry-making technique or did you feel like you were entering a new territory?

**MW:** For me, the process of making art is most joyful—and working with my hands, making something myself. That’s when I loose myself in time and feel most truly alive. This creative process was on the computer and it was fascinating, but it didn’t get to me in the same way making something by hand does. However, when the finished product came, and I saw how beautiful it was, I was enthralled. Then I put my handmade touch on it with the crystals. The finished tapestry is much more glorious, monumental and magnificent than anything I could have created with my own hands.



*Flying Around*, 2007, paper collage on canvas, 95 ins. x 57 ins



*Big Red, Detail*  
2007-8, jacquard tapestry with metallic threads  
and Swarovski crystals, 92 ins. x 65 1/2 ins.

**EG:** About your lenticular prints, in which a lenticular lens is used to produce images that have the illusion of depth...

**MW:** I've loved that process from the first time I saw those kitschy, old lenticular postcards. There's something magical about this illusion. [This printing method] had been used for commercial purposes before. Now, here was an opportunity to use it to make a limited-edition print in conjunction with a master printer, and I loved it for my work. I chose a collage I had made that had the look of going back into space. I traced the image by hand on tissue paper and created about eight layers; each one was then meticulously transcribed on the computer by the printers into this world of deep, illusionary space. You can tweak the color, change the minutest detail—the computer is a magical tool. I was surprised and happy with the result, but it's a leap of faith—you don't know what you've got until you see the final printed piece. I was trying to create that illusion of outer space and inner cellular space. It's a metaphysical outlook. I imagine I'm riding through the universe on a light wave. [I think of] Einstein's work, quantum physics—a bizarre cosmos of my own making, which is symbolic of space, time, color, movement.

**EG:** Imagine if Joseph Cornell, years ago, had had the chance to work with this technology when he was building his small boxes, [those] small theatrical stages on which his magic was played out. This particular, interesting new work of yours made me think of Cornell's boxes.

**MW:** Well, this [lenticular-print] piece also started as a handmade item, as a collage, which seems like a very fluid way for me to work. I can juxtapose things that may never come together otherwise. It comes to me naturally,



*The Mystic Flower of the Soul*, 2003, acrylic, starfish, jewels and mixed media on panel, 58 ins. x 58 ins.

new] technology took it into a whole other realm.

**EG:** These new projects of yours definitely offer surprises for people who follow your work. As long as you challenge

yourself, things are going in the right direction. Should we expect another tapestry or another lenticular print soon?

**MW:** I hope so.



*Bones of the Golden Serpent*, 2008, paper collage, painted foils and butterflies on canvas, 41 1/2 ins. x 53 1/2 ins.