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Barbara Shawcroft

Barbara Shawcroft is another who drew attention for large-scale nonloom textiles. Shawcroft, born in England in 1930, studied with Lili Blumenau in New York and Trude Guermonprez in the Bay Area, and worked for three years as a weaver for the Larsen Studio. In the '60s she drew press for her exhibitions—at Anneberg Gallery in San Francisco and the Larsen Showroom in New York—of articulated, larger-than-life double-weave stuffed figures. Three of them, under the title *The Family*, included both colors representing races of the world and a fantasy purple; they had happy looks on their faces and yarn hair added during weaving. By 1969 there were five.

In a 1970 solo show at Anneberg, she exhibited a chained and gagged 9-foot-tall woven *Black Man*, a seated Buddha with turquoise eyes, other items on Venus and mantra themes, and a knotless netting *Lovespace* hanging from the ceiling, which could be occupied. Fascinated with the ancient Peruvian knotless netting technique, she gave up weaving. Her suspended, enterable environment *Inner Space* (1971) was shown in the California Design exhibition in Pasadena, where it was seen by mega-collectors Eli and Edye Broad, who commissioned *Meditation Space* (1975). These environments—very much of their time—were tactile experiences requiring visitors to crawl into them and sit cross-legged or recline to experience the filtering of light through the netted walls. *Inner Space* was entered by tunnels; Shawcroft, who studied ballet as a child and was interested in the relation of form to the body, referred to this one as a “birth experience.” She was also interested in organic architecture by Gaudi, Soleri and Kiesler, and saw her works as architectonic definitions of space.

In 1976 she made *White Form*, creating a different spatial sense by defining an enclosure with a funnel shape suspended overhead. In the mid '70s, Shawcroft received commissions for public art in downtown San Francisco that offered this overhead experience on a monumental scale. One, at the Embarcadero Center BART station, was 50 feet high; another, 26 feet tall, was in a John Portman building nearby. Both had tubular legs suspended about 8 feet off the ground so passersby could walk under them and look up inside the work. Unfortunately, this BART work and another were damaged by the owner restricting passage, repositioning the works and not maintaining them—particular hazards for public art.