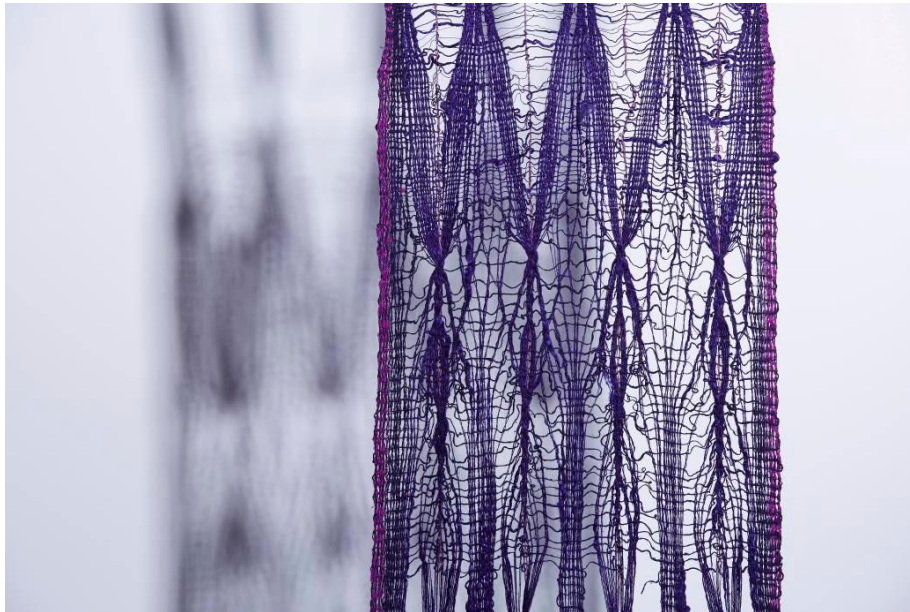

JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER **ARTS CENTER**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lenore Tawney: Mirror of the Universe
October 6, 2019 — March 7, 2020
John Michael Kohler Arts Center

Series of Four Exhibitions Explores Tawney's Life, Impact, and Work



SHEBOYGAN, WI—Lenore Tawney (1907–2007) was an influential figure in the postwar fiber arts movement with impactful and groundbreaking work that continues to reverberate today. Known for her monumental sculptural weavings, Tawney’s practice also included drawing, collage, and assemblage. Tawney’s life’s work, dating from circa 1946-1997, is the subject of a concurrent four-exhibition series, *Mirror of the Universe*, October 6, 2019 – March 7, 2020, at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center (JMKAC). The exhibition represents the most comprehensive presentation of her work since 1990.

Improvisational, experimental, and deeply personal, Tawney’s work redefined traditional notions of weaving as she manipulated fiber into abstract sculptural forms and complex woven structures. She held a deep belief in mystical philosophies which ran through all aspects of her life and work. Artists, scholars, and friends revered Tawney for the complete integration of her

art and her life including a series of New York City lofts she occupied from the late 1950s until her death in 2007. Her exceptional oeuvre can be seen as one cohesive body of work.

Emphasizing the poetic and spiritual threads running through her work, *Mirror of the Universe* considers the many aspects of her creative practice and present the full range of Tawney's work in collaboration with the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation and the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. *Mirror of the Universe* and the anchor exhibition *In Poetry and Silence* is curated by JMKAC's senior curator Karen Patterson. Collaborators include Glenn Adamson, senior scholar at the Yale Center for British Art; Kathleen Nugent Mangan, director of the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation; Mary Savig, curator of manuscripts at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art; and independent curator Shannon R. Stratton.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center will publish a major in-depth monograph dedicated to the artist, the first in three decades. Essays will be contributed to the catalogue by each of the collaborating curators.

"Deep consideration of Lenore Tawney's work is essential to any complete understanding of 20th-century art," said Patterson. "Together, the exhibition series and publication will generate a conversation about Tawney's life and impact, offering an unprecedented personal and historical view into her oeuvre."

The exhibition series is supported by community-based programming and a daylong symposium on October 5, 2019.

In Poetry and Silence: The Work and Studio of Lenore Tawney

October 6, 2019–March 7, 2020

One of the largest retrospectives of Tawney's oeuvre to date, *In Poetry and Silence* features more than 140 works. Arranged chronologically and by media, it spans from her earliest sculptures to her later assemblage, with a focus on the fiber-based sculptures for which Tawney is most well-known.

Anchoring the exhibition is an evocation of Tawney's studio, underscoring the relationship of the artist's space to her creative practice. Reuniting a selection of her key works—weavings, drawings, and collages—with objects that once populated her work spaces reveals her processes and inspirations, exposing relationships and dissolving boundaries between the material surroundings she constructed for herself and the art she made there. Tawney's studio, acquired from the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation with assistance from Kohler Foundation, Inc., represents John Michael Kohler Art Center's commitment to the preservation and presentation of artist-built environments.

Ephemeral and Eternal: The Archives of Lenore Tawney

September 15, 2019–February 16, 2020

Tawney developed a deeply personal visual vocabulary intertwining language with found images, feathers, flowers, and stones. Illuminating key moments in the artist's

career as well as her everyday life and close friendships, *Ephemeral and Eternal: The Archives of Lenore Tawney* explores the correspondence, journals, artist books, photographs, audio interviews, and ephemera drawn from manuscript collections at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art and the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation. More than a repository of materials documenting her life, the archive is also a landscape she cultivated as a daily log of inspiration for her art.

Even Thread Has a Speech

September 1, 2019–February 2, 2020

Even Thread Has a Speech is a group exhibition that explores Tawney's lasting impact on eight contemporary fiber artists with new, site-specific installations commissioned by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center as well as 2-D and 3-D works. From crocheted installations to macramé sculptures, video, assemblage, and performance, the works echo Tawney's visual language of abstraction and the desire to communicate without sending specific messages. Artists in the exhibition include Indira Allegra, Julia Bland, Jesse Harrod, kg, Judith Leemann, Anne Lindberg, Michael Milano, and Sheila Pepe.

Cloud Labyrinth

August 18, 2019–January 19, 2020

The presentation of *Cloud Labyrinth*, isolated and with ample room for contemplation, allows full appreciation of the work as an apotheosis of Tawney's decades-long career. A study in contrasts, *Cloud Labyrinth* comprises thousands of individual, tiny threads suspended from a canvas panel or "ceiling." Although composed in a strict square grid, the diaphanous work is yielding, responding to any atmospheric movement with a slight swaying. The piece was created in 1983 for the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial in Switzerland, and has not been shown since 1999. Part of Tawney's *Cloud Series*, which she began in the 1970s, the work fills an entire gallery, occupying a space that is 16 feet high and 24 by 18 feet wide. The work exemplifies the evolution of Tawney's practice into the complete dissolution of the loom while maintaining an unmistakable connection to weaving.

Accompanying the installation is the ongoing screening of the film *Cloud Dance* (1979). The film documents an improvised movement piece—a collaboration between Tawney and the dancer and choreographer Andy De Groat—in response to her work *Four-Armed Cloud* that was presented at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton. Accompanying the performance is music by the avant-garde composer Michael Galasso and a recitation of poetry by Christopher Knowles.

ABOUT LENORE TAWNEY

Lenore Tawney (1907–2007), born in Ohio, was a pioneering artist who created a body of innovative woven work that helped to shape the course of fiber art during the second half of the 20th century. She took classes at the Art Institute of Chicago and trained at the Institute of Design, Chicago, where she studied sculpture with Alexander Archipenko, drawing with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, drawing and watercolor painting with Emerson Woelffer, and weaving with Marli Ehrman. In the 1950s, Tawney moved to New York to dedicate herself to her art, becoming one of the first

artists to apply sculptural techniques to weaving, pioneering a new direction in fiber-based practices, and by extension, in contemporary art. Tawney is equally known for the collages, sculptural assemblages, drawings, and postcards that she began during the 1960s and continued to create throughout her long life. In New York, Tawney lived in a series of lofts, each serving as both home and studio, where she surrounded herself with her art as well as things that propelled an art practice forward. Organic items such as feathers, eggs, and bones were arranged in her space alongside studio tools, skeins of thread, collectibles, and mementos she acquired in her extensive travels.

Tawney's work is in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum of Art; Cleveland Museum of Art; Honolulu Museum of Art; Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Montréal; Museum Bellerive, Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich; Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Renwick Gallery of the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY; Tate Modern, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 1990, the American Craft Museum (now the Museum of Arts and Design), New York, mounted a retrospective of her work, which toured nationally.

THE ART PRESERVE, OPENING IN 2020

The work of Lenore Tawney, explored through an evocation of her studio environment, will also be on permanent view at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's Art Preserve, which is now under construction and set to open in August of 2020. The Art Preserve will be the world's first museum to focus entirely on work from artist-built environments. Visitors will have unprecedented access and insight into the display, preservation, conservation, and interpretation of the Arts Center's premier collection through tableaux as well as a unique system of curated, visible storage of the works of art.

ABOUT THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center located north of Milwaukee in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, was founded in 1967. It is dedicated to making innovative arts programming accessible to a broad audience that ranges from artists and academics to families and youth of all ages. Central to its mission is promoting understanding and appreciation of the work of self-taught and contemporary artists through original exhibitions, commissioned works of art, performing arts programs, and community arts initiatives. Since the 1970s, JMKAC has preserved, studied, and exhibited works by art-environment builders and has earned a worldwide reputation for its work in this area. Artist-built environments involve an individual significantly transforming their surroundings—for example, their home or yard—into an exceptional, multifaceted work of art.

The Arts Center's downtown Sheboygan facility includes eight galleries, two performance spaces, a café, a retail shop, and a drop-in art-making studio. Among its program offerings are community arts projects; artist residencies; presentations of dance, film, and music; a free weekly summer concert series; classes and workshops; an onsite arts-based preschool program;

and approximately twelve originally curated exhibitions of the work of self-taught and contemporary artists annually. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center also administers the renowned Arts/Industry residency program, which is hosted by Kohler Co.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center is located at 608 New York Avenue, Sheboygan, WI. Admission is always free. For information, call 920.458.6144, or visit jmkac.org, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#).

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Photo: Lenore Tawney, *untitled* (detail), 1961; rayon and wool; 63 x 22 3/8 in. Courtesy of the Lenore G. Tawney Foundation, New York. Photo: John Michael Kohler Arts Center.