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# GENERAL 'LY SPEAKING

Week of September 30, 2019

Dispatches From  
The Eisenhower Memorial Commission

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## SPECIAL EDITION: CREATION OF THE MEMORIAL TAPESTRY

### Part I: Design & Prototype

Throughout history, tapestries have served as both a form of art and narrative. As early as the 11th century, wool and linens were woven to create vivid depictions of events such as the Norman conquest of England seen on the [Bayeux Tapestry](#). The Battle of Normandy, depicted on the [Overlord Tapestry](#), serves as a modern example of tapestry. For centuries, the production of tapestries has gone relatively unchanged - dependent on numerous hours weaving material by hand. With the help of creative inventions and automation, the Eisenhower Memorial artistic team adapted a historic woven-art form to a modern 21st-century national memorial befitting President Eisenhower's legacy.



*The Bayeux Tapestry depicts scenes from the Norman conquest of England, linen embroidered with woolen yarn, ca. 1070*



*The Overlord Embroidery tells the story of the Battle of Normandy in 34 handwoven panels, England, 1968-1974*

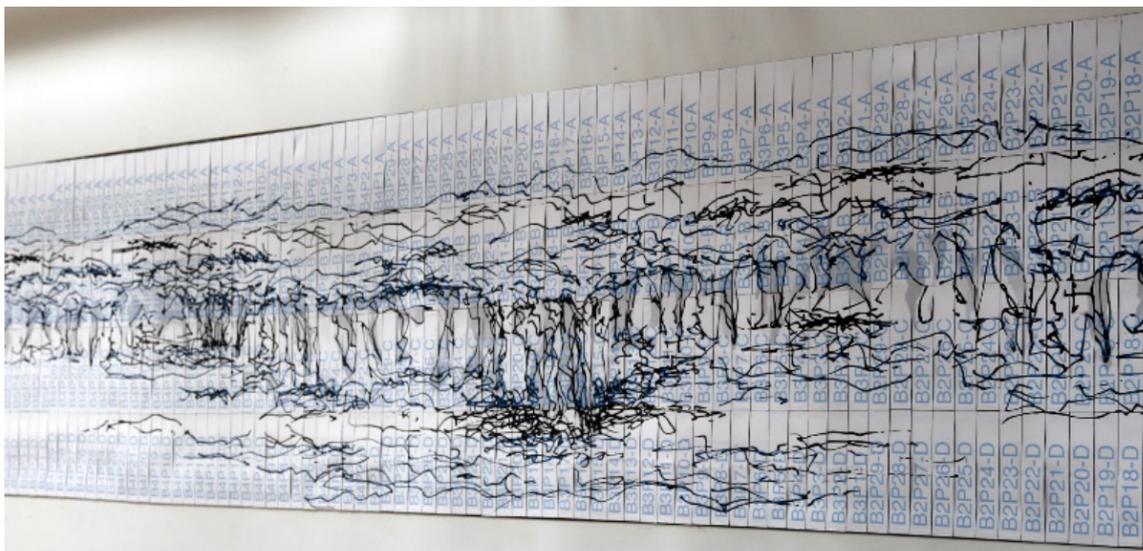
Under the design direction of architect [Frank Gehry](#), artist [Tomas Osinski](#) has created a stainless steel tapestry for the [Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial](#). The tapestry depicts the [Pointe du Hoc](#) promontory of France's Normandy coastline during peacetime and serves as a symbol of the peace Eisenhower sought and won as Supreme Allied Commander during World War II and then maintained and nurtured as 34th President. Although the artistic feature draws inspiration from historical tapestries, the process and materials implemented in the Eisenhower Memorial introduce a new innovative perspective on the conventional practice of tapestry weaving.



*The iconic Pointe du Hoc landmark is featured as a tapestry behind the core of the memorial that commemorates Eisenhower as President and General*

## The Twist

Juggling many factors and possibilities, the artistic team of the Eisenhower Memorial chose to use stainless steel for its durability. Stainless steel possesses a metal with natural qualities that ensure its longevity. The metal has a natural oxidation process that protects the steel from corrosion. The element of chromium in the steel makes the material resistant to corrosion when exposed to oxygen. Because the tapestry will reside outdoors, many physical and metallurgical tests were conducted to decide which type of steel would be used in the project. The tapestry proved widely successful in these tests including withstanding the vacuum pressure of an airplane propeller and losing only six of the six-thousand welds that were subject to simulated hurricane wind for one month.



*The tapestry artwork is divided into four rows and 150 columns creating a total of 600 panels*

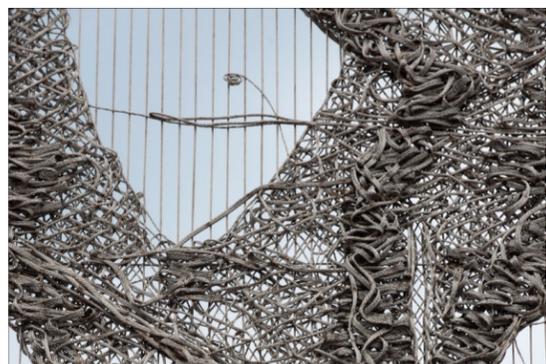
A stainless steel tapestry of this size has never been attempted before. Made of 600 panels, each measuring 3 feet by 15 feet, the steel tapestry is supported by a cable net system suspended from a stone-clad concrete colonnade spanning the southern perimeter of the memorial. Architect Frank Gehry chose an expansive element to add gravitas to the memorial park, to serve as a commemorative element providing context for the memorial, and as an urban planning element defining the space in its urban surroundings.

## The Prototypes

Gehry Partners, the firm of the memorial's designer, solicited prototypes from potential tapestry fabrication vendors. The firm set strict guidelines: the prototype must use the durability of stainless steel while producing a transparent tapestry. In response to their request, the firm received prototypes from a defense contractor specializing in reinforced military protection, an overseas tapestry manufacturer using traditional weaving techniques, and Tomas Osinski - an innovative artist and architect using a hand-crafted approach. Osinski's prototype was the only one to successfully achieve both image acuity and transparency.

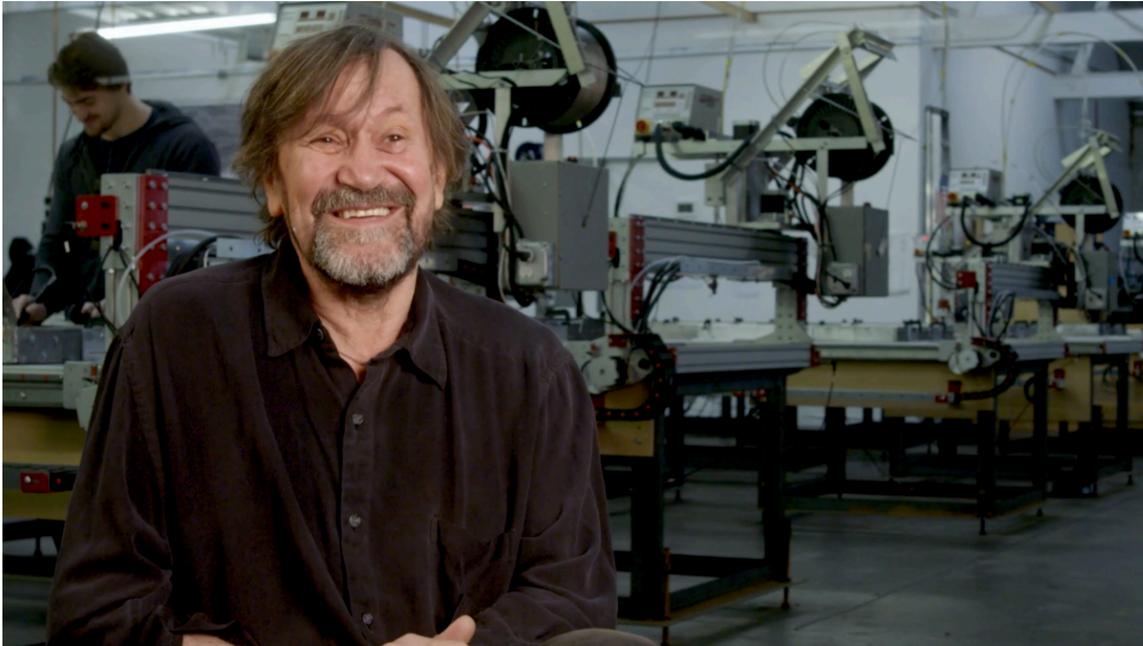


*Three prototypes on display in Washington, DC, 2011*



*Photographs of Osinski's first prototype on display in front of the U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, 2011*

## The Artist



Tomas Osinski began his journey in art at the Visual Art High School in Warsaw, Poland. Throughout his lifetime he has studied, taught, and produced numerous creations in various mediums. As an American citizen he worked all over the world producing works such as the Frank Gehry-designed Lillian Disney Memorial Fountain at the [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) in Los Angeles and the [Fish Light Sculptures](#) at the [Fondation Louis Vuitton](#) in Paris.

Once Osinski masters a medium, he sets his sights on a new specialty, challenging himself to learn and practice foreign techniques. The artist's creativity is fueled by obstacles, stating,

**“any challenge I can get in front of me is just something that really keeps me going.”**

With a knack for overcoming obstacles, Osinski was offered the position as tapestry artist and fabricator under the direction of Frank Gehry.



*"Rose" fountain (top), designed by Frank Gehry in honor of Lillian Disney and fabricated by Osinski, features cascading water over mosaic petals made from pieces of Royal Delft porcelain vases, Disney Music Hall, Los Angeles, CA, 2003*



*Fish Light Sculptures, designed by Frank Gehry and fabricated by Osinski, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France, 2015*

Osinski was given a deadline of eighteen months to fabricate the tapestry, requiring him to be adaptable on such a demanding timeline. As a result of the tapestry's rigorous research and development process, Osinski's artistic team was able to respond efficiently to new guidance and short-term requests.

The initial memorial narrative featured a depiction of the Kansas landscape, commemorating

Eisenhower's ties to his home state. As the design process continued, the design team proposed an image of Normandy's coastline to symbolize Eisenhower's role as a preeminent world leader. The initial artwork was a photographic representation of the Normandy cliffs and French landscape compiled from images captured by drone. As the team collaborated and received artistic feedback from the [U.S. Commission of Fine Arts](#), the tapestry artwork evolved from a photographic montage to an artful abstract line drawing of the Pointe du Hoc promontory in peacetime.



Progression of tapestry artwork from photographic montages of the Kansas Landscape (top) and the Normandy coastline (middle) to the final approved hand-drawn depiction of Pointe du Hoc (bottom)

With the final approval of the design, Osinski and his team began to fabricate the tapestry. Although the artistic medium was new and the deadline left little time for error, Osinski turned to his studio for inspiration and began innovating with automation. Throughout the process Osinski has combined the multiple specialties of architecture, industrial design, and creative artistry, to produce a distinctive tapestry, admitting,

***“this [the tapestry] is the most difficult project for sure, but at the same time it is the most rewarding.”***

## Next Issue: Fabrication & Installation

The next issue of *General'ly Speaking* will feature Part II of the Eisenhower Memorial tapestry - fabrication & installation.

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