

Art in Review

'Odyssey by Artemis'

Onassis Cultural Center at Olympic Tower
645 Fifth Avenue, near 52nd Street
Manhattan
Through May 21

The hair-raising adventures of the ancient Greek hero Odysseus (a.k.a. Ulysses) must certainly have been told before in tapestries. But this abstract version by Artemis, a weaver from Liechtenstein who works on the

tiny sunstruck Greek island of Tinos, has a zing that brings new life to the hoary saga. The 12 works of her cycle — woven in wool, cotton, silk and light-catching viscose — are based on Homer's "Odyssey" and "The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel" by the 20th-century Greek poet Nikos Kazantzakis.

They are deployed on the walls of the Olympic Tower's public atrium — some rather too high up — in lively groupings. In each work, jagged, torn, angular and polygonal shapes dance with organic ones — lobes, splotchy circles, forms with arcs and circles bitten out of them — on contrasting grounds to collagelike effect. The colors play off each other in subtle modulations.

In the six-panel "Resourceful Man," relating to Ulysses's cleverness, the rose-and-red ground of each panel is dominated by a sunny yellow motif. The motif changes shape from panel to panel as its placement steps up from low to high. Satellites in other colors nudge, invade or float around it. In the last panel, the yellow motif hovers exultantly at the top. The path was steep but I made it, it seems to sing.

"The Cyclops" evokes the barbarous one-eyed giant Polyphemus, a shepherd who imprisoned Ulysses and his men in a cave before they blinded him and escaped disguised as his sheep. In this playful work, multicolored shards and other shapes are scattered on a black ground around a central motif in streaked white that suggests a head, with "features" that could be read as a black hole for an eye and a mouth open in angry shock.

Most — not all — of the other works here also live up to the Ulysses story. Were Penelope, Ulysses' wily weaver wife, around, they might even meet with her approval. That conceit aside, Artemis scores high as an inventive designer, a fine crafts-woman and a sensitive translator of written to visual narrative.

GRACE GLUECK