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content



.. 1

Mission Statement: to Google or not to Goolge 2

Around town..... 4

Carl Stewart4

Janet Morton Full Circle.....6

A Bias-Cut Review by Martha Cockshutt.....9

Fray at TMC &Koffler Gallery..... 14

The Textile Museum of Canada: Award Winning and Working Hard 15

Thinking Fibre or the Tale waging the..... 18

My Knitting Career by Mary Kosta 18



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Mission Statement: to Google or not to Google

To ignore the divisions, address the arguments, dig up the history and present a balanced, unbiased, non-condescending picture of Contemporary Canadian Fibre and Textile Arts to a broad interested audience.

As is evidenced by: attendance to corporate presented events such as “the Creative Sewing and Needle Work Show” “One of a Kind” and “the Interior Design Show”, the increasing programming of Fibre/Textiles exhibitions in Public and Commercial Galleries, the growth of paid memberships in Guilds, Networks, and Associations of Weavers, Quilters and Knitters, the interest in making and buying of things fibre is on the increase. While being presented in “How To” segments of television shows, on the pages of magazines and books, as “Kits” and in workshop situations the bringing together of practicing “Professionals” either studio Artist or Design industry and the dedicated “Hobbyist” is generating ideas, cash, fear, loathing and an excessive number of objects not to mention concepts.

With an increase in enrolment to and graduation from Post Secondary Fibre programmes and the disappearance of both Art and Domestic Science from the general curriculum of the average North American High School with shift to a “I want to be a Super Celebrity Designer Television Show Host” mentality, we are raising a generation with no reality biased ambition with the skill to acquire information at the speed of light through the internet in a post historical world. “To Google is to know, NOT.” (I am quoting myself as far as I know) Information acquired/ “googled” is not the same as knowledge or technical skill gained and that is the conundrum in which all information archivists and presenters must work with.

Fibre Quarterly will take advantage of both the internet as a presentation method because of its inherent nature to redirect the user, and the pop culture “Vintage” object still and formerly known as “a Magazine” While using a standard magazine format; editorial and promotional along with the archival and interactive abilities of the web. Our editorial content will look at both art/craft historical development and practice from mid twentieth century until now while at the same time present a portrait of the rise and fall of the Canadian textile industries (mills, clothing and interior design applications) in both the context of “political economics “ and environmental impact. The interactive component will allow subscribers/ supporters and visitors to exchange information and engage in discussion.

All this will be presented in a slick high designed, professionally written yet accessible style the home quilter and staunch academic can both find informative and inspiring. “Why reach for the moon when we have the stars”

Joe Lewis, Publisher



Allyson Mitchell's "Sasshunk" /06, "Sassquog"/05 and "Sassfag"/06 are part of Fray an exhibition located at both the Koffler Gallery until October 13) and the TMC (Textile Museum of Canada until January 7 2007) and featuring the work of nineteen artist from across north America .

Around town...

Feb 20/ 06



Before I start I must pause and note the passing of Aiko Suzuki an artist whose work has been a small part of my life since I moved to Toronto until quite recently. For a period of time I worked in a restaurant across the street from the Toronto Reference Library just north of Young and Bloor, depending on my shift I had a habit of entering the library and standing in the lobby breathing deeply, listening intently and seeing a Louisiana swamp. I was transported out of downtown Toronto to a place I have only seen in films and on TV and felt in my soul by a piece of Akio Suzuki entitled "Lyra". Design as a

site specific the work hung in the lobby from 1981 to 2004. There was a gentle transcendent quality to it that always brought a smile to my face. Watching people walk by with out notice, hearing the sound of water dampening the interior sounds of the bustling first floor, looking up through the piece into the four storey atrium that blended with the muted colours of the hanging strands of wool that held the air, its moisture, its dust. Over time it had become a living organism it had life energy of its own.

The first floor has recently been redesigned Lyra has been removed to allow for cleaning and maintenance and I miss it. I am sadden by the thought that its creator will not be able to see Lyra return to the place it was meant to be and that there will be no more new work to be seen or imagined by Akio Suzuki 1937-2005.

Carl Stewart at the O'Conner Gallery December 15 2005- January 15 2006



... before I start running around to book launches and interior deigns shows (main stream and Alternative) Its more a matter of

what I didn't see, didn't get to until the gallery closed on the last day of the exhibition or my favourite excuse "the gallery moved" which is the truth. Carl Stewart weaver, needle point and now Quilt artist from Ottawa had a show scheduled for the [O'Connor Gallery](#) on Maitland Street in Dec only the installation turned into a move to a new space at Queen and Parliament. "Fragments: recent quilt works" December 15 2005 – January 15 2006 is a collection created from mattress covers, scavenged from discards and cleaned with in an inch of their lives, pieced appliquéd, sequenced and generally embellished these Fragments became objects of beauty. Found mattresses are part of Carl's always developing textile vocabulary. With his web project "[Fragments from a Discarded Civilization](#)" circa 1997 he provides a simple tour with maps and images of found mattresses, the variety of imagery is surprising, We don't see mattress as works of art, they are after all functional object and more often then not cover, out of sight.

There was one piece in the show witch brought together several different florals, collaged with a depth of perspective reminiscent of Japanese brush paintings or Art Nouveau prints. This was Carl Stewart's second show with the O'Connor Gallery which is celebrating its tenth year anniversary with a larger space at 145 Berkeley St. suite 100 at the south east corner of Queen East

and Berkeley. Carl Stewart is a member of the Enriched Bread Artist Studios in Ottawa at 951 Gladstone Ave. Their website is www.artengine.ca/eba other fibre artist include Uta Riccius, Karen Joron, who's installation work, "Ruffle" is scheduled for January 2007 at the [Mississippi Mills Textile Museum](#) in Almonte Ontario.



This opening was the same bitter cold night that the [Gladstone Hotel](#) had its grand opening, over the weekend the "Artist" designed guest rooms were open for the public to tour. I made three attempts to see [Kathryn Walters Felt](#) room but it was always locked and which oddly enough is not picture in the website either. You can find her on line at the FELT Studio website. There are some very cool designs and designers represented in these rooms and of course the annual "**Come Up To My Room**" alternative interior

design show is on Feb 24-26/06 that brings me back to today, there were a few more interesting shows on the go before Christmas but it was Christmas and that means run run run... it is a theme in my life



Janet Morton Full Circle at Paul Petro April 14 – May 13 2006

While wondering around looking at photos in the middle of May I was fortunate enough to drop in on the last day of the Janet Morton's "Full Circle" show at the Paul Petro Gallery. Janet Morton should be known to Textile fans for her knitted house "Cozy" which was show twice to bracket/ mark the millennium; on Wards island at 13 Third street in November 1999 and at Trinity Square in April 2000 if nothing else. It was constructed of recycled knit ware pieced together to cover an actual one story bungalow/ cottage and along with an exhibition called Wool Work at the Textile Museum in 2000 which featured knitted sculptures of everyday household objects in a series: Untitled (Domestic Interiors) and Untitled (Garden

Box) along with Casting Off (a series of text based hand knitted "tapestry" which were left unfinished (Casting Off being use here with the double meaning of both finishing a knitted work as well as throwing away).

It is the three Untitled (Garden Boxes) pieces included in this recent exhibition which caught my attention. An exhibition consisting of a retrospective of "Mandalas" that Janet Morton has produce through out her career. A Mandala, in the Tibetan Mandala tradition is according to the Oxford dictionary, is "a circular figure of a religious symbol of the universe" and as Morton who has an appreciation for Gertrude Stein "rose is a rose is a rose" (an all encompassing circular statement of existence) says in her artist statement "In hindsight, I realize I had been creating work using the circle form as a sort of personal meditation all along." She has worked the circle into her "Garden Boxes".

The "Garden Boxes" are in a long tradition of putting things in boxes to preserve protection or remember i.e. Reliquaries that housed bits of bone fragments or cloth or other objects supposedly belonging to Christ or some saint. It is a tradition that reached an apex in Victorian times when any thing and everything thing was put under glass. The Victorians like Morton created elaborate reefs made of dried flowers, hair

(mourning reefs), seed and even insects

(as was seen in the small companion show to A Terrible Beauty at the TMC) These three boxes of recycled sweaters, wire, wood and glass were monochromatic in colour scheme, one red, one grey and one white. Each had a collection of fruits, flowers, branches and leaves each made of distinctly different hand or industrial knitted clothe using different size yarns giving a unique appearance to each element then placed in a knit lined deep shadow box frame complete with glass (coloured glass with the Red piece) They have a haunting beauty along with a sense of both whimsy and irony. Duality is consistent throughout most of Janet Morton's work.

In many of the other Mandalas she combines "found" industrial made object then hand works them with traditional fine art (painting, drawing) or textile (stitching, embroidery) construction or finishing practices. As Reef making was a repast of the supposedly idle Victorian Lady who had to fill in time each day between "good works" and the leaving of ones visiting cards, the skill, and the labour or time intensive work involved in creating these objects has only in the last thirty been placed into the art history discourse. In one piece she has sandwich the objects (cutlery, sugar packets among others) between sheets of clear mid weight

plastic sewn them in then pieced them together using a gradation of size from large to small to create a pleasing balance of design that easily draws you in. These works are pleasing to look at but upon reflection they have a complication of meaning that isn't ever simple. When you start to look at the individual objects and consider that perhaps they have been rescued from ending up in landfill as toxic waist the ecological politics then combines with the feminist and post feminist theory the spiritual meaning of universal wholeness they become an indictment against the current industrial-political combine's stupidity.

Yet they remain pleasing to look at and there in lies yet another layer of contradiction. They could also just be an interesting interpretation of an ancient symbol as seen through contemporary eyes, either way it was a show worth seeing by an artist with who continues to intrigue

To find more information about Janet Morton

For her CV go to <http://www.paulpetro.com/morton/index.shtml>

Wool Work Catalogue is available from the Textile Museum Shop http://www.textilemuseum.ca/shop_books.html -jl-

Yurts, Camel Trappings a Salt Bag or Two



On Wednesday May 31 “Wandering Weavers: Nomadic Traditions of Asia” open at the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto. On June first I attended a Media Tour (which turned out to be a private tour) of the exhibition given by the curator Natalia Nekrassova. A soft spoken, knowledgeable and passionate person, she is more than willing to give you as much information as you want, while bringing you back to the objects on display. She begins her tour with the basic fact that the Museum has over 400 pieces in the collection from which to draw on and how she categorized her focus into four areas: the portable dwellings (Yurt and Tent), the animals that move them (Camel, donkey, mule and horse) the packing equipment for the move (bags of specific construction for specific purposes) and the transition from a traditional Nomadic to contemporary static existence.

This dry information is soon lost in utter amazement inspired by the objects themselves. The beauty of each piece complimenting the other draws you further into the exhibition. When you enter the gallery you enter the Home: the components of both a Yurt and Tent. These are the portable dwellings that have housed these nomadic tribes for centuries. During this time period the fibre based components whether woven or felted have evolved in ways specific to their functions. Long weft float woven straps that have more elasticity due to its structure have elaborate colourful designs that aren't necessary to the function of tying the support poles yet speak of the skill and artistry of the weaver. Wall coverings, floor coverings made differently for insulation, windbreak, comfort or decoration. Included in this first room along with the housing material is a vignette of figures in tribal garments.

The Igdry Turkmen of Khorsasan in northern Iran and the Tekke from Turkmenistan were the most prominent silk weavers. Woven on horizontal or horizontal looms of local silk these finely woven clothes of plain and warp faced weaves were fashioned into garments...

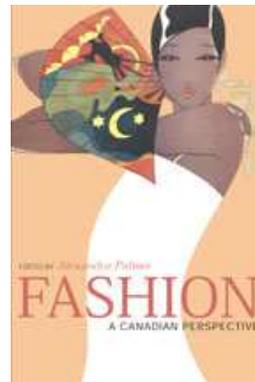
Let's face it words without the images or actual pieces to view can leave one losing interest easily. If it is the roll of the museum to educate and it is in the mandate of the Textile Museum of Canada to do just that. This exhibition is an

opportunity to learn about a way of life that is disappearing in a part of the world that is the current headline of every news outlet on the planet. The weaving among other fibre processing skills that are in the blood and bone of these traditional nomadic peoples are in danger of disappearing not through lack of interest by this new generation but by the reality that they are simply being killed. You can't remove the politics of region from which these object came from this exhibition and perhaps it adds to its importance. Natalia Nekrassova spoke of a moment in time when the Russian left Afghanistan and before the Taliban shut it down as a period of time in which westerners could travel and shop and many textile pieces were brought out, some of which ended up in the TMC.

While looking at this show it should be apparent that the sophisticated centuries old technical knowledge from which many western concepts have been derived i.e. western medicines is the work of the various people of the Middle East that are presented to us now as backward and religiously controlled by fanatical zealots have traditions that are far from backwards. Two years ago at the TMC Annual General Meeting Max Allen while speaking of the launch of the Canadian Tapestry website spoke of the logistics of repatriating the rugs to the source and how the website could at least allow on-line access to the keepers of the traditional skills. An interesting thought if you have a

secure power source to run your computer equipment and can get on line. Those of us that can get to Centre Street in Downtown Toronto should take the opportunity to view this exhibition and learn all we can while simply enjoying these stunning textiles. –
- joe lewis-

Fashion: A Canadian Perspective
Edited by Alexandra Palmer
University of Toronto Press, 2004



A Bias-Cut Review by Martha Cockshutt

When did it dawn on me that there was such a thing as “Canadian Fashion”? As a child raised in a household flooded with magazines and littered with Vogue sewing patterns, I can be excused for believing that all things fashionable emanated from Gay Paree. As a pre-teen, a subscription to “Seventeen Magazine” shifted my focus to the States: who cared about stoopit old Dior when Betsy Johnson was turning cartwheels just a few blocks south. By high school I had become obsessed – shopping vintage, designing, and building

clothes for myself and the girlfriends. My first “designer” dress was by Loucas Kleanthous – it was a rare find, terrific value for the money, and somehow just “right”. Perhaps it was then that I twigged: “Canadian Fashion – C’est nous!” Or, as Madge used to say, “You’re soaking in it.”

Imagine my delight when a volume focusing specifically on Canadian fashion crossed my desk. Fashion: A Canadian Perspective is a collection of fifteen loosely related scholarly papers on studies in Canadian fashion, and as such it does present some difficulties. With its admittedly “varied methodologies” in approach to the material, a rather eccentric cross-section of subject matter, and a marked unevenness of tone, one might complain that the book is “neither fish nor fowl”. We are presented with a wealth of potentially very compelling material, treated with varying degrees of “reader friendliness”. Some chapters exist as inviting and accessible pieces of popular criticism, meticulously researched and observed, while others remain firmly entrenched in “learned journal” territory. There is something of a “scattershot” feeling about the selection of articles for inclusion: we have fifteen experts in fifteen wildly divergent and specific areas of study. Why these particular subjects? Why together? Dr. Palmer attempts to address these questions in her introduction and through the structural framework she has imposed on the volume. The task of synthesizing

the material is, however, in the end, left largely to the reader. Are we meant to draw specific conclusions from this book as a whole, and in the broader context, about Canadian fashion in general? Palmer repeatedly points out that this is a notoriously under-served area of scholarly endeavour, a field of study still in its infancy, and this is certainly one of the chief impressions one brings away.

These rather pedantic complaints aside, what we do have in Fashion: A Canadian Perspective is a fascinating wealth of individual scholarship and analysis that will engage any reader with more than a passing interest in Canadian fashion. From the first entry, we experience a series of small epiphanies about who we are and how it is we got this way. Eileen Stack takes a provocative look at the mid-nineteenth century fabrication of a Canadian identity as woven into the ubiquitous Blanket Coat. She notes the impact of R. G. Haliburton’s theories: how a “unique and racially superior [Anglo] Canadian character”, as supported by “participation in outdoor athletics produced a ‘robust hardihood’ in Canadians”. Many of us continue to suffer the fall-out from such pronouncements 140 years later, and they still smell like wet wool.

Equally compelling is Cynthia Cooper’s essay on fancy dress balls. It is always illuminating to see illustrations of historical interpretations of historical

costume. They invariably seem to have more to say about the moment at which an image was captured, than they do about the moment in time they were intended to portray. The photos accompanying Cooper's text are charming, none more so than (Fig. 8) Mrs. Lindsay's mysterious and wonderful "lady from the time of Marie Antoinette". We are lucky indeed to have good documentation regarding the desired effect of her costume, for without it her intent may have remained a mystery. (Another quibble I have with this volume as a whole is pictures.



fig 8* Mrs. R.A. Lindsay as a lady of the time of Marie Antoinette, Montreal QC, 1881.

Copyright © McCord Museum of Canadian History, Canada, accession # II-60022.1

While we have 40-odd black-and-white illustrations, there are only eight colour plates included. I realize that colour reproduction is a costly proposition but a subject like fashion really begs for a little more splash.) Ms. Cooper also recounts the ongoing debate that raged amongst a populace scandalized at the opulence and expense of these much-publicized costume parties, attended, as they

were, by high-ranking government officials and captains of industry. Le plus ca change...

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There is something inherently tragic about the story of an industry marked for extinction. Christine Bates manages to bring

a face to the thousands of forgotten milliners working in Ontario through the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. We know how the story will end before it begins: a trade that afforded women the rare opportunity to make their own way as small business owners is doomed to fail with the rise of mass manufacturing and the department store. The most compelling aspect of Ms. Bates' article is the research gleaned from small-town newspapers, archives, and correspondence that brings these women to life, with all their business sense, style and panache. We can see the sense of pride and accomplishment in the face of the anonymous milliner (Fig. 15) from Midland, standing in the midst of her beautifully decorated shop. We are also treated to three delicious colour plates of hats from the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. ([see image list](#))



fig 15. A millinery shop in Midland Ontario, c. 1897 (national Archives of Canada, PA 178835)

Lydia Ferrabee Sharman's profile of "Lady" Jane Harris and her Montreal fashion salon embraces

the tradition of the oral narrative; the product of an extensive series of interviews with Mrs. Harris conducted during the last years of her life. Her personality leaps off the page as she leads us through the whirlwind that was Anglo Montreal "society" of the 1940's and 50's. Mrs. Harris' broad scope of interest and endeavour expressed itself in a fusion of fashion, theatricality and dance that feels as fresh today as it must have sixty years ago. She engaged dancers as models, staged fashion shows that were pieces of theatre in their own right, and created garments from fabrics hand-painted by artists. While the narrative biography may be a questionable form within the context of contemporary scholarly practice, it sure works for me.

I was gratified at the inclusion of Deborah Fulsang's examination of the impact of fashion television on fashion journalism in general. She acknowledges Jeanne Becker and *FT* for not only having begun the revolution - re-positioning the fashion industry within the context of mass pop culture, but also for placing Canada on the global fashion map. She presents a strong argument for how the resulting democratization of fashion has created a public that is more knowledgeable and demands more from their media. The broadcast medium continues to force the development of more insightful material on the subject and is responsible, at least in part, for the validation of fashion as credible

subject of study in popular art and culture.

Fulsang however never really tackles the complicated relationships that exist between an opinionated, genuinely critical press, and fashion industry insiders. She notes that Tim Blanks (*Fashion File*) has been accused of being “too nice to needle his interviewees”, yet neglects to make the connection that access is everything in an industry famous for its fickleness and black lists. She quotes Judy Cornish of Comrags;

The Canadian press has been unbelievably supportive of Canadian fashion – almost to a fault...I think that [the fashion press has] taken steps recently to be more constructive and more critical but in a very Canadian way where they just don't talk about stuff that isn't up to scratch.

I would offer that this politic is endemic to fashion journalism everywhere, and it is up to the individual journalist where they choose to position themselves in relation to their subjects. Jeanne Beker's staying power has everything to do with knowing where to draw the line in the opinion-flinging and dirt-dishing departments and still guarantee herself a return invitation (or not, as the case may be!)

Fashion: A Canadian Perspective contains many more fascinating offerings, on topics as diverse as labour history, dress reform,

fashion advertising, and the short, happy life of the Association of Canadian Couturiers. We give this volume two-and-a-half Lagerfelds out of three.

Images used with permission

fig 8* Mrs. R.A. Lindsay as a lady of the time of Marie Antoinette, Montreal QC, 1881.

Copyright © McCord Museum of Canadian History, Canada,
accession # II-60022.1

fig 15.A millinery shop in Midland Ontario, c. 1897 (national Archives of Canada, PA 178835) Copyright unknown

three delicious colour plates of hats from the collection of the *Canadian Museum of Civilization*. (explore the online collection of personal artifacts "more then just Hats" *return to articele*)

To Buy the Book

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Martha Cockshutt is a rather opinionated writer, designer, and theatre artist, based in Peterborough, Ontario(for her sins)

Fray at TMC &Koffler Gallery



untitled (dirt) by American Cal Lane at the Koffler Gallery

Fray open at the Textile Museum of Canada and the Koffler Gallery on the same night with a bus provided between locations. That was the plan, however there was a minor disaster at the Koffler (loss of power due to heavy rains which happens often) It was a very crowded event and impossible to get a good look at the work. Taking pictures of the personalities there (artist, curators, directors and generous Benefactors of the Museum and the show) for a gossipy sort of rendering of the evening was impossible. By all accounts it was the event of the summer. Then life got in the way and seeing the other half of the show at the Koffler Gallery was delayed until the other day so the opportunity to write seriously about the show has just occurred, but you'll have to wait for the next

issue of Selvedge Magazine to read my review. jl

The Textile Museum of Canada: Award Winning and Working Hard



TORONTO October 1, 2006 The Textile Museum of Canada (TMC) has received a significant contribution (\$452,923) from Canadian Heritage through the Canadian Culture Online Program to create *Digital Threads: Textiles / Art / Technology*. The latest in a series of Web initiatives, *Digital Threads* will tell compelling stories of Canadian identity through the work of some of the country's most important contemporary artists...

The Canadian Textile Museum celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2005 with eight mounted exhibitions and the launch of Canadian Tapestry, an online exhibition and database featuring more than 3,800 objects from the museums permanent collection. The event turned out to be a favourite of the 2006 Ontario Association of Art Galleries ([OAAG](#)) Awards which named *A Terrible Beauty*: an installation by Jennifer Angus, one of the eight exhibitions featured, as Exhibition of the Year, as well as recognizing Thor Hansen: *Crafting a Canadian Style*, with two awards for Design and Curatorial Writing respectively. Even the web launch did not go unrecognized at this years OAAG awards which granted Canadian Tapestry with the title of Website of The Year, a title that could be added to their growing repertoire as the site has also been awarded the prestigious Excellence in Arts, Lifestyle and Culture award from the [Canadian New Media Awards](#).

With so much attention at the OAAG awards, an increase in media coverage for *A Terrible Beauty* and subsequent increases in attendance, the TMC is using this interest to boost its role as public educator. The educational backbone of the TMC is well established thanks to the H. N. Pullar Library, and the creation of FibreSpace, hands on creative education space that has been a part of the Permanent Collection Gallery since 2004. This coming fall the TMC will continue to grow with the launch of Arts for Youth – Arts for Life, a new special educational project directed towards students in the elementary and secondary school systems.

As government and Board of Education budgets continue to tighten and arts related curriculum diminishes the TMC steps up its efforts to bring the museum experience to

this next generation. The Museum offers engaging and inspiring curriculum-linked educational programs for school groups. Their gallery/studio programs include an educator-led tour of the current exhibitions with stimulating hands-on activities, affording each student the opportunity to create their own textile artworks connecting cloth and creativity to everyday life.

To underwrite the cost of these programs for students and schools that are under stress from lack of funds and are unable to subsidize such activities, the TMC annual Golden Threads Campaign will fund this project. Arts for Youth – Arts for Life commencing in September will provide free-access for the large number of children from these disadvantaged schools. The TMC is looking to public for aid. A gift of \$50 will provide a visit for eight children: a donation of \$125, for example will underwrite a field trip for 20 young people. Working in partnership with the Toronto District School Board and the DAREarts Foundation (<http://www.darearts.com/index-flash.html>) the Museum will put its education department fully behind this increased effort.

To support or find out more about this program visit the website <http://www.textilemuseum.ca/support.html>



Photo's of the front of the Textile Museum of Canada

BACKPAGE:



Suzanne Carlsen, Toronto, Alternative Transportation, 2006, Cotton, thread, silver, hand embroidery, 3.5 X 1cm. each. This work was part of Fibreworks 2006 at the Cambridge Galleries in Cambridge Ontario, an hour north west of Toronto. During each of these Biannual exhibitions the gallery takes the opportunity to add to its growing collection of contemporary Textile and Fibre art. This year they purchased this collection of Suzanne Carlsen's fine embroidered Broaches along with the work of seven other artists.

Thinking Fibre or the Tale waging the...

My Knitting Career by Mary Kosta

I remember the knitted slippers and afghans my great grandmother made for us, and the hat made of mossy green hand-spun and hand-dyed wool, knitted just for me by a friend's mother. I remember the take-it-for granted attitude I displayed to these hand-made offerings: how I lost my slippers, spilled milk on the afghan, and gave away the hat to the Goodwill store. I had no idea of how much skill, patience, and love was required to knit something by hand. Now, years later, on the cusp of becoming a grandmother, I have decided to learn to knit. My grandmother did not learn from her widowed mother, having left school early to find work and help support her many siblings. Consequently, my mother did not learn to knit, or crochet, or sew, or any of the traditional handicrafts that girls learned when families were self-supporting. I am a third generation non-knitter, and whatever skills my Hungarian grandmother possessed were not passed down to me.

I enrol in a knitting class. Every Thursday, Carol James, a fibre artist from Winnipeg, teaches seven of us, women of varying ages, to knit. She assures us that nothing we do can possibly make us even slightly ill.

I begin, using long needles and fine, soft, genuine wool that I purchased years ago, in the vain attempt to teach myself. I go home, knit, unravel, knit, and again unravel the wool that persists in splitting each stitch into two new stitches. I return to class a week later, with about a half inch of knitted yarn, and sixty more stitches than I started with on my needle.

I trade in my long needles for short 5 mm needles and cotton yarn. I need the baby needles. I feel like a child learning to swim who gets water wings. What a relief to stop drowning. I learn to cast on. I will never be able to stop knitting because I cannot remember how to cast off. I picture myself, years from now, with a kilometer long dishcloth.

Soon, I no longer have to pull the loop away from the needle with my fingers so that I can force my needle in. My improved tension reflects my inner peace and ease when knitting. It is a karmic stage. I feel ebullient. I learn the purl stitch, and how to increase and decrease.

Now, secure in the tension, and feeling safe with the baby needles and cotton wool, I make a great leap, and attempt the moss stitch. Returning to class, I display my work, full of gaping holes. One of my fellow students comments that it is not called the “moth” stitch. Carol calmly, using a crochet hook, makes the holes disappear.

I have forgotten how to increase and decrease and cast on. However, I do remember how to purl, which a few others have forgotten. Carol patiently reviews everything with us. We all, by now, realize that learning to knit is similar to learning quantum physics.

In class, the pixies, as Carol calls them, do not make us cross stitches, drop stitches, split stitches or pull our yarn over. Once we are at home, we are besieged and beleaguered, and don't remember how to fix our mistakes. We bring to class the evidence of the evil done by these malevolent sprites. Carol shows us again, how to bring the new thread through the old stitch, or drop the yarn over into the fabric, or fish up the dropped stitch with a crochet hook and catch it up to the rest. I sit gape-mouthed in wonder at her magical skills, but I know with deep certainty, that if I remember how to fix my mistakes, I will forget how to make them: in short, I will forget how to knit and purl. The human mind can only contain so much esoteric information.

It is the end of the third class. Some students can blithely do the scallop and eyelet stitches. They are the good students. I can recognize a purled stitch and a knit stitch. Carol is very patient.

Once I decide to stop unravelling my mistakes, I become bolder. I learn the garter, stockingette, and single rib stitches. I try hard not to think about checks, eyelets and scallops. My reach does not exceed my grasp. I am humble.

It is the end of the fourth class, and Carol has given us a mitten pattern. I am going to try it. I have learned a little of this new, highly coded language of knitting patterns. In my sleep, I mumble “K2tog, inc 1, P2 sts” over and over. I dream of Johnny Scissorhands

and his delight when I present him with a pair of holey mittens, knitted with my specialty, the moth stitch.

Mary Kosta is the fumble-fingered librarian at the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Someday, she will knit Pangnirtung style hats for her grandchildren to remind them of the Northwest Territories, where she raised her daughters as non-knitters.



BRAIN by Sarah Maloney, (98-99) knitted cotton on stainless steel armature on display at TMC

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