2009 Conferences

Inspired Design Conference notes; by Joe Lewis, Volume 5 Issue 2/ Spring 2009

For me, and I believe for many others, what stays with one after an experience is a combination of the experience itself and what was taken away. In the case of the Inspired Design conference in Hendersonville, North Carolina, this past January, [which was organized by the Center for Craft, Creativity and Design] the experience and what was taken away was beyond good. That others share this view is evident in the reviews of the conference that have arrived:

“Every one knew they were sharing an extraordinary moment in the recent history of jacquard weaving” Beatrijs Sterk: editor Textile Forum [TF1/2009 March]

“I loved having so many students there. It was encouraging to meet and talk with a keen “next generation” of textile artists” Robin Muller: associate professor NSCAD (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design)

“…there were so many people there whose names I had only read in books, or whose work I've studied to inspire my pieces- I guess I was "star struck". Jenna M. Eason: student conference assistant from North Carolina State University.

“…it was the cool people that were there that made it truly enjoyable.” Megan Coyan: artist/designer/maker Columbus, Ohio
Kari Merete Paulsen (Norway) - A Contemporary Picture 2002, 262" x 62", wool and viscose Jacquard woven "Documentary" at Textielmuseum in Tilberg, Netherlands, photo; Terrie Gibson (CCCD)

This three day international conference and its accompanying exhibition of the same name was presented by the Center for Craft, Creativity and Design, a regional inter-institutional center of the University of North Carolina in Hendersonville, North Carolina and was held at Blue Ridge Community College. The North Carolina area has a long history of textile production and this conference represented a focused look at contemporary Jacquard art and production yardage and Entrepreneurial Textiles with a secondary look at the reality of the decline of the North American textile industries. The conference was divided into five areas of interest; 1. Smart Textiles, 2. Performance and Interactive Textiles, 3. Boutique Clothing Textiles, 4. Exclusive Interior Textiles, 5. Public and Private Textile Commissions.

Shibori- Catharine Ellis woven at the Oriole Mill Hendersonville, North Carolina; Photo by Terrie Gibson (CCCD)
Within these categories, there was a mix of presenters from academia (full professors and graduates doing post doc research), artist /makers with production studios and teaching positions at Craft education centers and Universities, designer / makers from industry, an art consultant discussing how artists need to negotiate commissions, publishing: (a historian, Michele Fricke, from Kansas City Art Institute), a practicing fibre artist, who wrote the introduction to the catalogue and was the last to speak and was applauded greatly when she said she would now bill herself as a “Craft Historian,” and Andrew Wagener (editor and Chief of American Craft). There was, as well, one person who is, to my mind, a pioneer of this new century, and who is breaking ground in a new blended world of art/ industry and culture, doing it on her own terms and sacrificing personal financial security to do it. This is Bethanne Knudson founder of Jacquard Center and director of the Oriole Mill. The entire conference was an information packed, four day event filled with heady imaginative imagery, concepts and personal histories, along with extraordinarily depressing statistics, tales of departmental shifts away from studio space to computers, bankruptcies and loss of copyrights, not to mention the loss of skills over one generation of textile workers.

Clothing made from Tim Parry- Williams' textiles woven in Japan and used by designers involved with Livingstone Studio, London, photo by JL

At the exhibition opening on Thursday night, the participants met/mixed/looked at the work of many of the presenters. In attendance were movers and shakers of Jacquard weaving art and education world such as: weavers Louise Lemieux Bérubé, (Canada), Lia Cook (California), Katharine Ellis (North Carolina), Alice Schlein (co author of The Woven Pixel) and Vibke Vestby (TC-1 Looms / Norway), curator Matilda McQuaid (Copper Hewitt, New York), and researcher / critical theorist Janis Jefferies (Goldsmith/ England)-- to mention just a few. Thanks to the efforts of the CCCD to make the event affordable to students, students from all over the United States from schools known for their Craft and design programs were able to attend this three day gathering. My own agenda for attending this event was focused on the specifics of direct relationships between artist/ makers and industrial production.

Diminishing industrial textile production in North America and Europe has come at the very time that artists are acquiring the knowledge base to be able to use the computerized industrial machinery. This new collaboration between artists and industry is happening in places such as the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles in Montreal, and the Jacquard Center in Hendersonville where the conference was held. I detected a certain feeling of urgency at this conference which, coincidentally was timed to occur during the transition from Shrub, as Molly Ivins delighted in calling Bush, to Barack Obama. The hope in the air of America was well represented at the conference. The future of both education and
industry is up for grabs and the ideas presented and discussed have the potential of moving up the ladder into someone’s political agenda. Art, crafts, design and industry have a base in both education and business and therefore are political concerns. Who better then those intimately involved suggesting ways of change that can affect the future decision making?

Sara Clugage, “Adam Kadman I & Adam Kadman II” 2006, Cotton, 52” X 40” woven on Jumbo loom at Pure County Mill, California, photo: Terrie Gibson (CCCD)

You might be wondering why I am advocating a political agenda rather than discussing the art. I will make that connection now. In the Smart and Interactive Textile presentations,

Matilda McQuaid looked at the work she curated for the Copper Hewitt 2005 exhibition, Extreme Textiles. She showed work being developed with environmental, medical, military and tele-communications applications. Barbara Layne, a professor at Concordia University, and a member of Hexagram; the Institute for Research and Creation in Media Arts and Technologies researching Interactive Textiles and wearable computers, where she designs textiles for costume and stage, dance and other performance events. She spoke of her work and about ethical funding sources for her research. Joanna Berzowska, Assistant Professor of Design and Computation Arts, Concordia University, Montreal, and founder and research director of XS Labs, has developed animated fabric, constructed with conductive yarns and thermochromic inks together with custom electronics components woven on a Jacquard loom. While showing a wall piece, she spoke self-power generating garments. Christy Matson, Assistant Professor, Fibre and Material Studies Department, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, showed and talked about the creation of her touch activated “audio” textiles using the local Radio Shack and hardware store for source materials.

Looking at access to funding, sourcing materials, maintaining educational facilities while developing new relationships between industry and education, maintaining the “hand” in computerized industrial production, and revitalizing traditional practices, were some of the subjects touched on at this conference. These directions of inquiry and discussion were extended into each section of the conference’s presentations and breakout sessions. They may not have been the main focus of any on presentation but were consistently brought up.
Tim Perry-Williams, presentation in the Blue Ridge Community College lecture hall, photo: Dian Magi

**Tim Parry Williams**, is Senior Lecturer of Woven Textiles, **Bath Spa University**, Bath, UK, and Associate Designer for **Fabtex Co.Ltd** in Kiryu, Japan. In 2003 he was selected as a project artist for "Through the Surface", a series of mentoring collaborations between textile artists from Britain and Japan, and worked with leading Japanese contemporary weaver **Junichi Ariai**. He received his BA in Woven Textiles (1996) and MA in Art and Design: Textiles (1998) from the **Surrey Institute of Art and Design**, University College and spent one year as an exchange student at **Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts**. Parry-Williams is a studio handweaver, demonstrating a craft-industry interface in the creation of contemporary apparel fabrics. Handwoven samples become models and vehicles of concept, informing the industrial production of a central Japanese textile manufacturer whose primary concern is niche-market fields of the common natural or “noble fibres” and popular synthetic and acrylic yarns. **Craft: Industry Interface—a Dialogue Between Hand, Heart and Machine** (an anglo-Japanese collaboration), by Tim Parry Williams, Future Voices: Celebrating Diversity Exhibition Proceedings. **New Craft Future Voices**, 92-93).

Tim showed textiles designed for clothing, spoke of his experience in Japan learning about and working with “vernacular plant-fibre textile and Japanese Sen-culture” traditions. He pointed out the decreasing number of traditional practices and source materials that are being supported in a last ditch effort by researchers and small impendent designers but didn’t stress it. However I was reminded of companies like **NUNO** in Japan bringing traditional cloth makers together with designers, while the pool of skill and knowledge base is steadily dwindling. This phenomena of dwindling knowledge isn’t restrict to the almost archaic traditional practices alone; it is rampant in the “industrialized West“ where mills established during the industrial revolution, and that have survived into modern times using modern machines, are shutting down. In the last thirty years, as mass industrial cloth production has relocated to the Orient, and especially to China, companies are forcing themselves to develop relationships with education and cultural production for the sake of survival. **The Lisio Foundation** in Italy comes to mind. This is not an easy mix.

**Ismini Samanidou** is a designer/weaver, teaching textile design at **University College, Falmouth**, where she was artist in residence in 2004-2006. She designs woven fabrics for interior spaces, ranging from one-off pieces to limited edition textiles, woven mainly on industrial computerized looms. Her textile design called “ismini” is licensed to **George Spencer Designs** and is available in their London
showroom. Her "Twigs on the Cuadra Chair", exhibited at the Milan Furniture Fair in April 2006, includes a textile design developed for collaboration with furniture designer John Miller. Samanidou spoke of her education and how she was amazed by the possibilities of textile construction on the loom. Since woven cloth has a structure it is in point of fact sculptural. She wondered if a multi-layered cloth could be connected at one warp thread in the centre as an axis point so that the layers could spread like spokes on a wheel. She experimented, succeeded and was drawn deeper into experimentation and research.

She came across the digital jacquard industrial loom at the MA program at the Royal College of Art. Using the loom enabled her to experiment more freely with designing directly from her own photography. Seeing the fabric being woven, and working closely with the technician at the RCA meant she was able to interfere with the loom and adjust the design as it was being woven, changing the yarns and colours and densities intuitively as one does when hand weaving. After she graduated she spent a year trying to get access to this much specialised technology. This proved to be impossible as there was no access available in traditional mill set ups. The only way she could continue to make work was to work on such a loom in a University environment. She applied and took part in the British Craft Council's NEXT MOVE scheme, an initiative set up to support recent graduates wanting to continue making work. Access to specialised facilities is made possible by the designer maker becoming an artist or maker in residence at a host university for 2 years, making and working amongst the students, who also benefit from the experience of having someone work on real projects.

Her hands-on manipulation in production allowed her to create non-standard effects where woven structures are changed by adjustments in tension and colour shift, thus bringing a very traditional hands-on approach to this industrial process. Her respect for the machine and what it can do convinced the University administrators that a direct relationship with outside design professionals and artists with the school was beneficial. There is now the opportunity for designers and artists to access the jacquard looms at University College Falmouth through a weaving bureau. This relationship has developed and other students have an opportunity that, had the program been left to administrators, would never have occurred. (As of this posting, the Next Move program that allowed Ismini Samanidou to make her bold move has been discontinued)

Bethanne Knudson founded The Jacquard Center in 2000 after working in the industry and becoming Director of Training and Technical support for JaquCAD Master®, a Macintosh based software used to design jacquard woven textiles. She is also the director of The Oriole Mill (in Hendersonville) which opened in 2007. She spoke about the whys and wherefores of starting both facilities. She pulled no punches in her impassioned presentation, making it quite clear that the concept of artist/ maker and designer/ maker textiles being produced with industrial machinery requires a new mindset. The standard trajectory of a mill employee was limited to specific aspect of the line: set up, maintenance, finishing, a smooth uninterrupted flow, the artist craftperson's approach is one of sampling. Interrupting this process for refining or experimentation is not regarded as a formula for success. Working with established mills looking to fill in ever increasing gaps in production by working with artists who where gaining design skill through the Jacquard center on small runs was proving problematic. With partner Stephan Michelson, they sought used machinery (mills where shutting down or moving offshore quickly through the 1990s and early 2000s) and real estate. At the same time, they were also looking for workers familiar with the equipment. It took time to build a team with the right combination of knowledge to work across the different aspects of warping, weaving and maintaining the machinery. With a few false starts they opened for operation in 2007. It is a daily gamble.
The highlights I have selected represent only a fraction of the information and ideas that came to light during this conference. Another highlight involved tours of the Oriole Mill where we could see some of the machinery in action and hear Bethanne Knudson wax poetically about her “baby” and the indispensable and quickly adaptable staff of technicians that keep the mill operating. We saw samples of production work she, and Pauline Verbeek-Cowart, artist/maker/designer and associate professor, Kansas City Art Institute, have been producing. With a side trip to Ashville for an opening at the Blue Spiral Gallery that further showed that Craft was vital in North Carolina, dinners with crowds big and small, and lots of down time to socialize—the Inspired Design: Jacquard and Entrepreneurial Textiles Conference in Hendersonville North Carolina was a shocking and successful event that has set the tone for the up and coming 15th European Textile Network Conference in Austria, the theme of which is Cultural Revival of Old Textile Centres. New Educational Challenges. See you there

Left to right: Christina Leitner from the Textile Kultur Haslach in Austria, Vibeke Vestby of Digital Weaving Norway developers of the TC1 Loom and board member of the Europe Textile Network, to my right is Beatrijs Sterk the Secretary of the ENT and publisher of Textile Forum magazine. we are standing in the classroom at the Jacquard Center, also in Hendersonville, photo by: Stephan Michelson,

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Center for Craft, Creativity and Design http://www.craftcreativitydesign.org/

http://www.nuno.com/no-flash.html

http://www.fondazionelisio.org/

Next Move has recent been shut down. The initial findings from the BOP Consulting evaluation were these: that while there is a definite need for support of this kind, Next Move, in its current format, may not be the most relevant, efficient and best-practice model. The economic climate for recent graduates has evolved considerably since 2001, the year of the scheme's inception and, in addition, we have seen
major developments in teaching practice and funding within Higher Education, as well as changes within the Crafts Council itself. [from British Craft Council’s website]

http://www.thejacquardcenter.com/index.htm

http://www.jacqcad.com/

You can read about the following international events in the pages of fibreQUARTERLY:

Some of the selected artists in Shanghai with Professor Lin Lecheng (far right). From left are Joan Schulze (USA), Germany’s Bernhard G. Lehmann and Canada’s Louise Lemieux Bérubé.

From Lausanne to Beijing Fifth International Fiber Art Biennale & International Fiber Art Symposium
held at Tsinghua University and the A. C. Embassy Hotel in Beijing November 25 and 26, 2008, story by Carol Westfall in Volume 5 issue 3 fall 2009.


European Textile Network(ETN) group at the entrance of the Textile Centre Haslach, the former Vonwiler Weaving Mill in Haslach/Austria.

European Textile Association’s 15th biannual Conference: “Revival of Old Textile Centres: a new future for training”  Held in Haslach, Upper Austria, Wednesday, July 22 until Friday July 24, 2009