Knitting

Regine Faust Profile

Part 1: *Regine Faust: Timeline: Germany by Joe Lewis* volume 1 issue 3 /Fall 2005

finding Regine

Regine Faust knitter, designer, teacher, artist left a legacy in the concrete form of an archive housed at Seneca College in Toronto; a series of knitted tapestries at the Museum of Civilization in Hull and in a non-tangible form of lasting influence. As a teacher at the Sheridan School of Fashion Design in Oakville in the seventies and early eighties and by giving workshops she has given both a methodology and a work ethic to thousands of people. Talking to people who knew her one discovers the primary aspect of her character was work, always work. From an early age it was her ability to turn ideas into objects that propelled her forward. She had her first patterns published while still a student, translating her creative thought into patterns easy for the novice to professional knitter to produce garments of individual quality.

It is almost a decade since her death and it is time to present her to a generation that has benefited from her teaching and re-introduce her into the discourse of contemporary fibre scholarship.

The following profile consists of my “Regine Faust: Timeline” and a reprint of “Form and Intuition: Regine Faust’s Design” an article written by art historian Anne Davis Director of the Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary Anne Davis met Regine while working on her book about Faust’s daughter “Somewhere Waiting: The Life And Art Of Christiane Pflug”. She wrote two articles about Regine’s life and art for MacKnit a magazine for machine knitting enthusiast that
Regine Faust: Timeline part one: Germany

Regine Schuett was born in 1912, Rostock, Germany, into a bourgeois middle class family. Her mother came from a family of craftsmen that included weavers dating back to 1530, and her father’s background was composed of well-to-do millers and bankers with a strong interest in intellectual and cultural pursuits. She attended the School of Textile and Fashion Art and the Academy of Art in Berlin. This was a radical move for an unmarried daughter to leave home and pursue a higher education. While at school and afterward, while specializing in Knitting, she immersed herself in the design library and consulted old art books and catalogues, and pattern books to develop a unique design portfolio. The director of the Library organized an exhibition of her designs which led to more work in the fashion design and publishing industries. In 1939 she was awarded a Master's Degree from the Knitting Guild. She was the first women to be awarded this degree. She worked as an illustrator and designer for knitwear, lingerie and home handicraft magazines and began publishing her designs before graduation and continued to publish in leading European Fashion Magazines such as Die Dame, Die neue Line, Sport im Bild, Die Elegante Wels, and the textile paper The Konfectionar. Later she became the editor of a leading Knitwear Magazine.
Her work was filled with motifs and designs taken from ethnographic sources and art history that depicted elements of nature, flowers, trees, and animals - images that continued to be foremost in her design and artwork for the rest of her life. Sweaters, suits, dresses, coats and accessories - designed, illustrated and transposed into instructions by Regine with the help of a few assistants from her home studio - graced the pages of these publications. During this period her designs were published internationally and she produced numerous special editions for the Leipzig publisher Verlag Otto Beyer. The work ethic and skills developed during this period stayed with her. However, the atmosphere in which she worked became more and more restricted, as the Nazis rose to power through the thirties. They sought to control everything, including women's fashion. Eventually there was no yarn, no fashion industry or fashion magazines.

Knitting Machine, like loom or sewing machine, is an implement of fabric construction. "The tool does not create the artist does"

In an excerpt from a recently published book "Nazi Chic" by Irene Guenther [1] published in the September/October 05 issue of Selvedge Magazine the following description of the period is given: "Hitler’s rise to power brought a national natural look for women to embody the health and strength of the Reich. They were to be fresh faced in the party uniform or the dirndl of the newly restored national costume; wholesome bastions of racial purity fulfilling their simple duties in the domestic sphere. The women complied with their duties, breeding and working en masse for the war effort, but despite intense pressures to conform to the proscribed style and to relinquish all cosmetics, permanents and dyes, most simply refused.” During this period Regine joined the anti-Nazi group called the Adversary.

When “Fashion” disappeared she joined the German Red Cross where politics were less emphasized and you didn't have to be a member of the Nazi Party. “Soon however Regine returned to the publishing world, this time as a writer. Within a year she transferred from her nursing job to become head of the Press Division for Magazines of the German Red Cross. In an area dominated by men she was one of only three women correspondents allowed to cover
activities at the Front. When Paris fell, she became a prisoner of war - an experience she actually relished because she was now able to express her anti Nazi feelings, openly." [2]

Rebuilding her life and business after the war was easier because of her politics (having never joined the Nazi party) and her academic credentials. She moved from Berlin to Frankfurt and to design and edit for another Otto Beyer’s publication Handararbiet and Waesche. “In 1951 Regine moved to Hamburg where she became editor in Chief of Constanze Knit Fashions. In this position she produced four books featuring her own designs. Despite great success in re-establishing herself at the centre of the German fashion and knit world, Regine and her husband Peter no longer felt comfortable living in Germany. In the autumn of 1953 Regine took her daughter Mikki to meet Peter in Toronto, Canada. Her elder daughter, Christiane, stayed in Europe, attending courses in fashion design in Paris.”[3]

To have come of age in the period between the two world wars in Germany and specifically in Berlin during the rise of the Weimar Republic and its subsequent failure making way for Hitler and the Nazi party was an experience that marked Regine Faust, to say the least. There is obviously more to say about her life in this period of time. As the roles of women where changing and opportunity for higher education increased the Bauhaus was reinventing an approach to Applied and Industrial Design, and creating architecture with Socialist leanings.

During this period Regine made personal decisions that produced a daughter out of wedlock, engaged in political activity that if known, could have brought about her death by the Nazi SS and did cause the death of her partner. (German Historian Hans Koppie is writing about this period of her life.) From 1953 until 1970 Faust worked at various design jobs including doll costume designer for Regal Toys. It was a struggle to establish her autonomy, but all that changed when she was hired by the newly-opened Sheridan School of Fashion Design in Toronto to teach their machine knitting course (despite the fact that she had not yet worked on a knitting machine!). Working with an instructor from the knitting machine manufacturing company, she kept one class ahead with her first class but eventually discovered the range of the machine’s capabilities and created a four-year program. She developed a book from the curriculum, and then her creative self emerged to produce more books and patterns that expanded the “Home Use” of the machine into a tool of design.


Regine Faust Bibliography


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"American Indian Designs Adapted to Knitting", Regine Studio, 1980,

Design With Knit, Regine Faust, 1983

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MaJoile: Knitwear Designer Lysanne Latulippe: interview by Joe Lewis
Volume 5 Issue 2/ Spring 2009

March 12, 2009: Lysanne Latulippe's studio at LABcreative, in Montreal, Lysanne Latulippe is a graduate of the MCCT and the founder/owner of "MaJoile" knitwear fashions. She is a textile artist who is fascinated by the multiple dimensions of her art, which reflects the complex structure of knit fibres. I had the opportunity to interview her this past March in her studio in le LABoratoire Créatif in Montreal. She is both off hand and frank in talking about her journey from fine arts student to knitwear designer working with an industrial mill to produce her exclusive and unique fashions.

Question: Why did you go into textiles and knit ware design?

LL: Why did I go into textiles, I always tell the same story, which is true so I guess that is why I tell it, I was in London 12, 15 years ago and I was visiting the Victoria and Albert looking at all those textiles and I was like Oh my God this is gorgeous, this is like really really nice all in those cases it was just looking like flipping pages in a book.
I was studying Art and enjoyed painting more than sculpting, and had begun studying Art History but stopped, realizing this was not the path I wanted to follow. I decided to travel and ended up in London and looking at all those textiles and I thought instead of painting on a canvas I could be building up/making the canvas with the colours I wanted as well as patterning, I could be making cloth.

When I came back to Quebec I was looked for a way of learning how to do this. Then I found this school the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles and went to look at it and really liked it. I decided to apply, was accepted and came. At the beginning of my first year I had a preference for weaving, you worked with the hands, it was a simpler then using the knitting machines which for me were awkward and gave me a headache, I really enjoyed the weaving.

Question: Since the MCCT offers a range of courses in textile and fabric construction weaving, knitting, felting, along with embroidery, why did you focus on knitting?

LL. I think knitting came over me while I was studying in the second year. I realized it was more accessible, you could start making something right away with a single strand of yarn. In weaving it was a long process where you had to make and set up your warp, dress the loom and that takes time. With knitting I could get my hands on the fabric faster then with weaving. I was already considering the type of business I wanted to have, I think I had always known I wanted to have my own company or studio. I never saw myself being employed in a mill or in the fashion industry, but since I was learning how to make clothe and I had taught myself to sew clothing when I was younger I was able to take the knitted fabric in my hands, drape it around me I think I can do that, or I can do this. So fashion is where I was handing and it is where I am.
Question: Having established your studio when you finished school and starting your own label ‘MaJolie” in 2002 how did you go about expanding your production?

LL. when I started my studio I bought my own Brother knitting machine, a small domestic model with a limited width and was too restrained I couldn’t do things as wide as I want to for the grading of the clothing so I though this is ridiculous working on that, and I found another type of machine still domestic but built almost as a industrial machine, it was wider it had almost double with more needles on the machine so I buy one then another. (Which I have placed at the school (MCCT) because I just moved studios at the end of January) I was working night and days and weekends and week nights and just working and working.

Daniella, Viscose lace top. from Majolie Summer 2009 line  
photo by Photo by Frederic Bouchard

Désirée, Multicolour Stripes pattern in viscose and cotton. from Majolie Summer 2009 line , Photos by Frederic Bouchard.

Soon you realize the capacity you have if you are producing everything by yourself. I wanted to and needed to do more, more product for more sales, more sales building a market needing more product. Even though my price point is higher then others regular designers I needed to produce more products to support the business and make a good living I realized I needed to go for quantity and so I wanted to buy an industrial Machine, I wanted to own one, I always loved machines, I am good with them, I can fix them. I really couldn’t afford it though. It took me a long time before I decide to work with a mill. I wanted to stay in Montreal, Québec or at least in Canada, some where. I didn’t want to go to China, I wanted to make sure the workers were well paid and that I could work with the mill rather then give them orders and take what came out.
Question: How did you find the Mill you are working with?

LL. I met this guy who was selling the machines and I visited the mills he was selling to so that is how I had first contact with these guys with a mill in Montreal. They where use to making yardage and thousands of pieces and they didn’t really want to make exclusive pieces. They just want to make a ten thousand of black all week and when you come and ask can you make twenty of that and twenty of these and eight of those, they find it difficult to scale down. It took careful negotiations for me to get them to work with me at first but they like many other companies where losing enough contracts and costumers that they realized they needed to be flexible enough to work with small runs in between the lager one to keep steady work. Since they had been introduce to me by some one they knew and had a working relationship with (the machine salesman) they say “OK that’s all right we’ll try this way”. They see me more as a friend then a costumer some one who knows the process really well and they say “Lysanne with you we know you know our work so it’s good to have some one who knows what we are talking about; and its easier then working with a costumer who is asking for the impossible”

Universals MC 868 Knitting machine at Les Tricots Giorgio Inc

I started working with them three years ago, it has been a learning curve, it’s always tough when you are past over because they’ve got bigger orders from bigger costumers. It is a balancing act. The amount of my work they can produce, when they have time to produce it far exceeds what I can in the same time span, counter that with them finding time to slot me in and then needing to rush it if they get another big order. It is not an ideal situation but they produce a quality fabric which is Made Canada which is important to me and my market. I have increased my unit numbers while still keeping them exclusive. I am patient and never complain really but it is sometimes frustrating none the less and it is a business after all and given these economic...
end of this interview

With the knitted fabric produced by the mill Lysanne then hand crafts each garment. Lysanne Latulippe has become part of the closed process of designer, manufacturer and market place where the artist/designer is also a maker and uses both hand and industrial process to make her work. She can communicate with the industrial maker in their technical language while defend her hand work to a savvy market. She has built a market for her knitwear through out Canada selling through small independent owner operated Boutiques.

She has identified her sellers as women from cooperate communication and marketing who have branched out on their own with an understanding of the market place. Her market place is local, impendent and sell Canadian Made and value that. She designs unique exclusive clothing for people who are more conscious about their buying habits, with an interest in how and where things are made. They have growing concerns about the ecological impact of clothing production. but that is a story for another time.

LABcreative http://www.labcreatif.ca/index.php

Founded in 2004, the Lab is an independent not for profit organization headed by a union of fashion designers whose mandate is to support business development for fashion design in Montreal and Quebec. Its areas of support are based on the needs of its members in all facets of operation of a small companies specializing in fashion design or the creation, production, management, distribution, promotion and funding.

The vision of the Lab is to promote the establishment of companies in fashion design to facilitate the creation of synergies between entrepreneurs by the provision of resources and sharing expertise. The Lab is therefore acting as a center of opportunity for fashion Quebec.


Photographs: Frederic Bouchard. www.fFbouchard.com

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