Printing

Virginia Johnson Presents
Canadian Contemporary Design by
Carol-ann Casselman fQ volume 5
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IDEA

Virginia’s designs represent a combination of contemporary design and colour and offer a relaxed way of wearing clothes that are cool and comfortable in our steamy summers. My first impression looking at one of her designs called Cocoon, with loopy red circles, was of Inuit prints and drawings. I reflected on the crayon/marker drawings and designs of Inuit Artists’. Her excellent video/slide show on her website, www.virginiajohnson.com confirmed my thoughts. Birds and animals have always been part of her image bank. Virginia’s knowledge and practice of painting, drawing and mark making informs all of her work. Designs for her signature line continue a tradition of inspiration from nature, travels and Canadian Inuit Art.

PROCESS: Idea to Print

Virginia Johnson is a Canadian textile/clothing designer and illustrator. She studied at Parsons School of Design before designing shoes and bags for Helmut Lang and has illustrated 3 books for Kate Spade: Occasions, Style and Manners. Her own signature line launched in 2002 is available in 100 stores worldwide including Barneys New York, Kate Spade and Ron Herman. The beginning of Virginia’s signature line included a tunic body then expanded into different shapes, including sundresses, blouses, bikinis and accessories including scarves, bags and home accessories.
PRINT PROCESS

The first ideas are created using watercolour paints on paper.

The final design is sent to the printer on paper or digital file with colour swatches to Cutler Printing. Aluminium frames are made by Viking engine Tool & Dye Co, both in Toronto. Images are painted onto acetate then exposed on a light table. The design is transferred onto the stretched silk & fastened onto the frame with liquid staple glue. The positive parts of the design are washed away by water and allow the ink to print the image onto the fabric. Separate screens are used for each colour.

Fabrics made of cotton, hemp, canvas or jersey, are fed onto the belt for printing with hand mixed water based inks in one or two colours. The fabric is then put into a drying machine for curing of the ink. It is then delivered to Virginia for cutting and sewing.

Patter Samples: top row Jungle flower in lilac, Racing, in grey, Leaf in blue, bottom Forest in yellow, pink Berry in pink, Fern in green

Poetica tunic poppy 100% organic cotton voile

The final samples and fabric go to the factory for cutting and sewing of finished garments for sale. Shawls are printed and finished off shore.

Virginia Johnson on working with printers:

"We use Cutler Textile Printing on Geary Ave, near Dovercourt and Davenport. They have been around for ages and are a family-run business. The main person-in-charge is Vince and his wife Frances runs the office. I have also used Artistic Textiles recently as I’ve been experimenting a bit with digital printing, but we’ve used Cutler for years and the bulk of our production is screen printed."

EXHIBITION

Beaver Tales: Canadian Art and Design,
University of Toronto Art Centre, September 16 – December 6, 2008.

Co-Curator Rachel Gotlieb

Virginia’s Geese in Flight Textile Roll 2006 was in Beaver Tales: Canadian Art and Design

Beaver Tales was a seminal exhibition at University of Toronto Art Centre, Co-Curator Rachel Gotlieb wrote in the Beaver Tales catalogue – “Virginia Johnson employs the familiar composition of Geese in Flight but, in contrast to past artists, gives it a contemporary makeover by simplifying the design and reducing the number of colourways. These works show that designers continue to explore Canadian motifs to unite both commerce and culture”.

COMMUNITY

Virginia teamed up with World Literacy of Canada, a non-profit organization that promotes international development and social justice. For a year all proceeds from sales of her Camel image scarves raised money to facilitate education of women and children in Varanasi, India. She is currently planning another project with this group.

Plates (in copper colour 100% merino gauze wool shawl from Kashmir, India, 44 x 82)
INNOVATION

In the summer of 2008 Virginia contracted Sharon Epstein for a workshop to expand her knowledge of the print process. With Sharon’s unique leadership skills Virginia developed new textured looking designs with earthy qualities and expanded ideas for hand-painted dying techniques that lead to digital printed designs.

Winter 2008

Virginia introduced puffy jackets and vests with two versions of prints. Coats made of wool using the same prints produced a different impression.

Resort 2008

The graphic arts inspired line came from a drawing of a warrior made by her brother when he was six. A traditional dress from Uzbekistan evolved a design with square and rectangular appliqués which reminded her of breast plates and body armour. Fabrics used saturated colours and a hidden pocket in the front panel seemed perfect for collecting things.

2009

Virginia’s current designs embrace the resort and summer line.

She is focusing on the tunic as a basic with shawls in different weights of fabrics. The shawls have been a financial success and true to her first love as a painter this 2 dimensional format expresses her painterly style.
Storefront on Ossington Ave taken by jl

Virginia Johnson Ltd. store is located at 132 Ossington Avenue, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Photographs where provided directly by Virginia Johnson or through her website and used with permission unless otherwise identified.

Carol-ann Casselman is an artist and designer/maker in glass, ceramics, concrete, plaster and embroidery. She is an enthusiastic supporter of the visual arts community leading self-promotion seminars focusing on portfolio presentation, and individual creative career development consultations. fQ volume 5 issue 2

VIVA LA SCREENPRINT!!! by Judy Black fQ volume 5 issue 2

JUDY BLACK DESIGNS

Throughout the years of creating and designing one of a kind hand printed items my business partner and I knew we could start a business. We saw the opportunity in the market by observing the industry and several fashion companies. The realization came to us when we saw countless companies creating similar items that lacked originality, colour, and the personal touch of “hand printed” made in Canada products. At this point we saw the opportunity for our work and created Judy Black.
When our company launched in 2007 it was interesting to see the response of our clients because we have been told numerous times that our products stand alone in the market due to the quality, design, colour and originality of our prints. Throughout the past two years we have been faced with many decisions whether or not to outsource our printing instead of hand printing because of the costs associated with doing it by hand verses machines. We know that economically it’s less timely and expensive to produce using machines.

However if we were to go this route it would present far too many limitations such as using water based ink verses plastisol ink, not to mention a charge every time you want to change a colour!? It would also affect our methods and design features such as full coverage printing verses a 10x10 design area (offered by most printing companies), as well as cropping at the sleeves and printing over or up to the neck line of a shirt.

Choosing the “hand print” method allows us to have a stronger connection to our product by designing exactly what we want and quality control, which is important to our clients and Judy Black. It differentiates our product from the “mass production” methods that exists in the market today. By “hand printing” small runs allows us to produce only the best merchandise so we can be proud to represent a product that not only is made in Canada (by just 2 gals) but also has originality and high quality.
My first encounter with screen-printing was in first year at OCA. As an elective I took intro to print with Marlene Honsa (then the head of Material Art and Design) and fell in love with both her and the method of printing. I then chose this as my major for the next 3 years. The infinite possibilities the process had to offer was memorizing to me. You could express so many different moods, effects, styles and colour combinations using just one image, one screen! (Almost like a slowed down, hand done version of the “paint bucket” tool) Brilliant as well, from one screen you can print on anything, and from anything you can make a screen! And I have! Printing on everything from wood, fabric, concrete walls and people, to making screens from flattened bugs, leaves directly from the garden, oiled out photocopies and tape cut-outs. With so much room for experimentation, mistakes became spontaneous innovations and the process fluid and therapeutic.

At the same time I’ve worked in focused, detailed, precise and planned ways, (the budgerigar) using only hand eye co-ordination to register layers. I also fell in love with “that” moment when you lift the screen and uncover the results. Enough to make you stay home on the weekends, it’s just plain FUN!

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