Who Made That: the Calgary Bridge Banner Project.

Zoo Bridge, Chirp Chirp, I wish I were a bird...Tarp/snow fencing/recycled flower banners/grommets, hand stitched/embroidered, approx. 3 ft x 6.5 ft

It is Tuesday January 5, 2010, its minus 15 degrees Celsius, I am walking across the "Zoo" bridge in Calgary with Stefanie Wong and Marci Simkulet to see the banners these two ACAD University graduates have created for the 2010 City of Calgary Banner Project. As we approach the first banner they are excited to see how the snow has added to their work. The woven "nest" insets created in each white or blue banner has been catching the newly fallen snow on the concave interiors and convex exterior much as real nest will. They speak of the bird sanctuary to the south east of the bridge and their desire to denote the practice of nest building from salvaged materials, as they have reused material from the cities stores of former banners and snow fencing. We tour all of their banners [140] made for the downtown Bridges, but it is too cold and traffic thick, and near by parking unavailable so I didn't take any more pictures.

Centre Street Bridge, "57, 600 feet", Mason's line/fishing line/recycled face banners/vinyl/grommets, hand woven, approx. 3 ft x 6.5 ftInspired by the grand structure of Centre Street bridge, these handwoven banners add vibrancy and colour to the existing structure. From a distance they provide a burst of bold colour against the city buildings and vast Calgary sky and up close they reveal tactility innate to hand woven cloth. 57, 600 feet of mason's line and fishing line were handwoven on a loom to create these banners. The inlayed circular shapes, woven from old banner material shift position from banner to banner to create movement similar to the colour variations."In the Summer of 2008 while doing an off site intreactive/public art piece called "Camper" for Truck Gallery artist Stefanie Wong and Marci Simkulet found themselves in the parking lot of Eau Claire Market by the Bow River in downtown Calgary. They where perpared to sit and knit and weave with a group of freinds and former class mates and maybe talk with people if they stop to ask what was going on. Instead they soon had people who worked in the area dropping by during lunch or after work with their knitting, crocheting, ebrodery and stories. Where they had assumed they would be contriputing to a public discourse they soon found themselves being gifted with presonal stories of mothers, fathers and family stories about teaching needle skill to the next geration.It was an unepcted emtional, educational and entertaining roller coaster. One of the people who came by was Mieka West - who was working as a Consultant with the City and liasoning with artist and going into the third year of the "Bridge Banner Project" Two years into this initiative started in 2008 the city had "decorated" the Bridges leading into the down town area with banners which had been designed by artist, then industrialy printed. Causaly Marci wonder if having the banners hand made by artist might be an interesting way to go. Mieka West invited them to submit an idea. 18 months, 140 banners later, they were being instaled in the depth of winter for the New Year.

Works in progress

Inglewood 9th Ave bridge, "Transformations" "The Inglewood Bridge is a passage way from downtown into an older neighbourhood of Calgary where historic architecture illustrates the beauty of aging. The bridge also shows this aging process through the rusted metal on its structure. Inspired by the setting, these banners become a part of the surrounding environment through the material choice. 45 pounds of fleece sheered from local sheep was hand felted to create a natural background for the banners. Mason's line which was also used to create the banners on the Centre Street Bridge was hand stitched into the fleece to create a delicate texture and pattern. Depending on the light, the inlayed materials become more defined and the fleece becomes transparent." Marci Simkulet felting

9th Ave Bridge, Transformation: Fleece/mason's line/vinyl/grommets, hand felted/piece work/hand stitched, approx. 3 ft x 6.5 ft a friend helping cut some of the printed banners from the first years Louise Bridge &ndash: 10th Street, Faces in Disguise " In the spirit of re-using materials, the banners on Louise Bridge were constructed from the 2008 series of banners by Marjan Egermont. All 150 banners were cut into long strands of fabric which were then individually hand knit to create three dimensional art pieces. Take a closer look and you will see bits and pieces of the old banners such as eyes, mouths, bugs, etc. protruding from the hand knit creations. By using the traditional process of hand knitting, each banner is unique and is characterized through the maker's hands. It took ten old banners to create one new banner and 46,480 stitches to complete all twelve banners!

Thanks to all our dedicated cutters &ndash; Janine, Judi, Karen, Kari & Seathra."
This has been a view of some of the bridges, the materials and processes. The story of how they came to be. You can see the entire body of work on line at Mackenzie Frere's Calgary based on line craft gallery Poplar Gallery. Online invites you to view Bridge Work, a recent public art commission conceived and hand-made by artists Marci Simkulet and Stefanie Wong. 150 banners utilizing a variety of textile media including knitting, weaving and felt-making have been created for seven urban bridges spanning the Bow River in Calgary, Alberta. In many of the banners recycled materials (including old bridge banners) are used. These are applied in a site-specific manner, addressing the particular history and context of individual bridges. A massive undertaking, Bridge Work presents a compelling intersection of the hand-made and the architectural. Designed to be viewed by both pedestrians and drivers who use these bridges every day, Wong and Simkulet's bridge banners are at once a humane and thoughtful presence in an urban landscape.

In terms of public textile art Calgary is the home of the largest tapestry piece in Canada. The "Unity" tapestry work is by Tamara Jaworska and was made for Gulf Canada Square, 401 9th Ave SW in Calgary. It was commissioned and installed in 1972, and is made of Irish Linen, handspun wool, horse hair, silver thread and lurex. Original setting in the Gulf Canada Square. "Tamara: The Art of Weaving" It is 22 feet high and 33 feet wide and due to renovations, cleaning and changes in management just where this monumental tapestry was unclear to me until I saw in the new year when I was visiting Calgary in January. photo credit: Kathy Flanagan GWL Realty Advisors the new management of the building consider it a prized possession and the redesign of the lobby is a sign of good corporate art stewardship. Being given the opportunity to sell the piece to the original owner they declined. He has recently presented them with copy of "Tamara: The Art of Weaving" for which they are making a display case to place near the plaque located to the right of the tapestry. looking up from ground level directly in front of the piece, photo:JL Image provide by GWL Realty Advisors; photo credit: Kathy Flanagan It is all about scale and point of view. Here is a photo taken from the second floor where you see across into the skyline and down into the garden. This is an impress piece of large scale gobelin tapestry. completely hand woven for this building.

For more information on Tamara Jaworska's Public art read

Who made that: a question about Public (Textile) Art in Canada?

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