Finding the Thread: Contemporary 3 Dimensional Fibre Work.

"Aurora" Kai Chan, 1975, cotton and nylon thread, wood, 102 X 305 X 25 cm, collection of the artist, part of Kai Chan: A Spider's Logic A 35-year retrospective at the Textile Museum of Canada from November 7, 2010 - May 1, 2011 and the Varley Art Gallery of Markham from September 26, 2010 - January 30, 2011, photo taken by Joe Lewis with permission of the TMC.

In the 2010 exhibition season Kai Chan: A Spider’s Logic A 35-year retrospective was organized by the Textile Museum of Canada and the Varley Art Gallery of Markham from there it was put on tour. Kai Chan was born in China and resides in Canada, in 1973-74 he was part of Textiles into 3-D (*1) and exhibition organized by Helen Duffy and Claire Watson circulated in 1973-74 by the Extension Department, Art Gallery of Ontario. In the Spring of 2013 American maker Fern Jacobs was in Repetition And Ritual: New Sculpture In Fiber; at the Fowler Gallery March 26 May 25, 2013; the Hudgens Center for the Arts Duluth, GA she was in the 1972 exhibition Sculpture in Fiber; at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts (now Museum of Art and Design) in New York City. Textiles into 3-D 1973-74 (*1) and exhibition organized by Helen Duffy and Claire Watson circulated in 1973-74 by the Extension Department, Art Gallery of Ontario left to right: (high) the Bat by Joanna Staniszakis, (below) Decorated Woman by Madja Van Dam, [hanging tube] Thicket by Brenda Campbell, [panel] Sarabande by Helen Francis Gregor, (hanging) A Million and One Knots - Organized Chaos by Guerite Steinbacher (on the floor) Set Piece/ part two by Mia Westerlund.

Part One: Setting the Stage. In 2011 I saw The Toms Pauli Foundation Collection; which was shown at the Lithuania’s 8th International Kaunas Biennial TEXTILE 11: REWIND-PLAY-FORWARD. The works in this show were collected during the Lausanne Biennale in Switzerland. Started by and Centre international de la tapisserie ancienne et moderne; in 1962 to showcase contemporary but traditional tapestry, it became the vehicle for the showing the non traditional and the experimental work that was flowering in the 1960s and 70s. This collection is now of significant a historic importance. In March 2012, I attended the opening 5 days of Fiber Philadelphia, and in October and November of that year there were over 30 exhibitions in and around the Toronto area with 26 being part of the World of Threads Festival. There was 3 dimensional work in almost every exhibition with one with only one specifically curated to present this type of work. THREADSpace Threading the 3rd. Dimension; at the Canadian Sculpture Centre Nov 8 - 30, 2012, was a look at current work in fibre by both sculptures and fibre/textile artists. Curated by Richard McNeill and, Shuhui Lee it was part of the World of Threads Festival in Oakville and Toronto. Having the opportunity to see 3d work exhibited during Fiber Philadelphia [March 2012] and the World of Threads Festival in Oakville and Toronto [November 2012] convinced me that there is continued interest in making 3 Dimensional textile and fibre forms. However, there seems to have been little to no advancement of work that used structural techniques to create self supporting pieces except in felt. The use of armatures and other strategies that were explored in the 1960s continue today. These include such techniques as suspension of pieces that were woven or pieced, stitched together and stuffed, draped and/or folded upon or stacked. At this point taking a cue from one of the works I saw during Fiber Philadelphia, Rachel Mica Weiss’s piece entitled Saging Ellipse, (After Richard Serra), suggests that there is a way of going forward by looking back. Atlas: Janina Jakobow 1973 Technique: Knot-less knitting (Coptic knot) Material: Sisal, Size: Height 7 ft. Diameter 4 ft, from Textiles into 3D image provided by The Robert McLaughlin Gallery used with permission of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Agnetha Dyck, Shrinks (Gold) Felted Crochet, 100% Wool 2012, 18 x 13 x 12 in. Micheal Gibson Gallery, London, Photo Joe Lewis taken at the 2012 Art Toronto with permission of Art Toronto.

In the 1960s Claire Zeisler, another American maker who explored the off loom technique of Macramé, said her goal was to create a freestanding sculpture that could support itself without a foreign armature in it. She achieved this with her piece, Cascade, a macramé piece made of Natural jute, 30” x 80” high composed completely of knotted and wrapped fibres. For me, this is a high water mark in 3 dimensional fibre works --- and a rarity. Paul Smith, the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts [1963 - 1987] first presented Clair Zeisler along with Anni Adams, Sheila Hicks, Dorian Sekai and Lenore Tawney at the museum in the 1963 exhibition Woven Forms; He writes in the introduction to the museum’s 1973-74 exhibition Knot-less knitting (Coptic knot) Material: Sisal, Size: Height 7 ft. Diameter 4 ft, from Textiles into 3D image provided by The Robert McLaughlin Gallery used with permission of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

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The molecular base of fibre, whether it is plant or animal base, allows through processing the flexibility necessary for the invention of textiles, basketry, ropes, nets, etc., and the numerous techniques in interlacing that created the variety of useful and decorative objects that fill the vaults of museum worldwide. From the mid 1800s onward it has been the discovery and examination of these objects through archaeology, anthropology, ethnography and movements such as numerous arts and craft and folk revivals that brought about a serious documentation of European textile technique from the medieval era onward.

From the 1940s onward there was a revolution deeply rooted in textile history (designing and making) which coincides with modern art breaking through abstract expressionism rigidity, and with the emergence of the feminist movement. People working with fibre and textile construction came off the loom and began to experiment with rediscovered techniques coming out of archaeological finds. Jumius Bird’s excavation at Huaca Prieta, Peru, was an eye opener (see Jumius Bird and Louisa Bellinger, “Paracas Fabrics and Nazca Needlework, 3rd Century B.C.–3rd Century A.D.” The Textile Museum, Washington D.C., 1954). The 1954 exhibition “Ancient Arts of the Andes” curated by René d’Harcourt Museum of Modern Art, presented ethnographic artifacts as artwork; to be appreciated for their design rather than their function or role. The subsequent English language version of ethnologist Raoul d’Harcourt’s “Textiles of Ancient Peru and Their Techniques” (1962, reissued 1987; originally published in French, 1934) gave textile craftspeople a new way of thinking about their work as well as an illustrated break down of the different techniques. As artists join craftspeople exploring different aspects of textiles as medium, the structural flexibility, the surface, and the physiological attachments to cultural history, socioeconomic history and personal memory all became a source of inspiration the stage was set for the explosion of creativity that followed. Maggie Tchir and Kathleen Hill, Earth Nest. stacked Merino and Romney wool felt, barley seeds and maple branches. Photo Joe Lewis, taken at Quite Zone, World of Threads Festival 2012. Queen Elisabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre Oakville OnAndrea Noeske-Porada “Inside is Outside” Relief Felt 3D scarf 2010 100% merino wool fibre, 9.06 X 7.87 X 15.75 Photo Joe Lewis taken March 3 2012 at Outside/Inside the Box exhibition at Crane Arts Building, Icebox Project Space, 1400 North American St, Philadelphia, PA part of Fiber Philadelphia 2012. Sarah Martin, Liverpool England. I Can Hear the Trees Sing 2012; 12 wool silk, acid dye, polyester boning, polyester thread, marble shibori, dying wet felting and needle felting. Photo; Joe Lewis at “De rerum natura (on the side of nature)” Nov. 2 - 18, 2012, Joshua Creek Centre, World of Threads Festival.

By the mid 1980s individuals come out of movements, guilds, associations which had propelled textile and fibre work forward to establish practices as academic gallery artists or product designers and makers. There has been a flourishing of work done using textiles and fibre as a medium. Some ground was gained into the fine arts world -- but some was lost in fibre and textile crafts. In the crafts, a general move away from functional work in multiples to produce purely decorative objects exploration in textiles has resulted in more concentration on surface decoration, applying integrating response/ smart technologies that turn the static into the animated -- and in some cases concept has dislodged skill. The slow infiltration of the contemporary art world by people choosing to work with this media has resulted in the current flavour-of-the-month celebration. Maker’s education, technical skill and approach to making are as varied as instructors in institutions and workshops and/or individuals learning. While the objects are 3 dimensional in construction, some are exploded to explore their volume rather than their surface and it is those sculptural incarnations that this essay is attempting to explore.

Part two: Britta Fluevog

Part Three: Rachel Mica Weiss

for notes and links related to this story go to page 2

Notes for Finding the Thread: Contemporary 3 Dimensional Fibre Work

Exhibition Links;

Kai Chan: a Spiders Logic (on Tour http://www.textilemuseum.ca/apps/index.cfm?page=exhibition.detail&exhld=313

On-line representation

The story behind the exhibition http://www.velvethighway.com/Textiles%20into%203D/thestorybehindtextilesinto3d.htm

"Repetition And Ritual: New Sculpture In Fiber" on tour

There is a Flicker album put up by the curator http://www.flickr.com/.../modernf.../sets/721576330303085/

"Sculpture in Fiber" 1972 at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts a PDF of the catalogue is available at in the digital archive of the American Craft Council http://digital.craftcouncil.org/cdm/search/searchterm/American%20Crafts%20Council.%20Museum%20of%20Contemporary%20Crafts


see Dietmar Laue "The International Lausanne Tapestry Biennial 1962 -1995 an inconsistent Venture";
Textile Forum 3/2012 for an interesting take on the successes and ultimate closure of the "venture";

THREADSpace: Threading the 3rd. Dimension November 7 &ndash; 30, 2012

Photo spread http://www.worldofthreadsfestival.com/artwork_pages/2012/threadspace.html

Makers websites

Kia Chan  http://www.kaichan.ca/bio.html

represented in Canada by David Kaye Gallery http://davidkayegallery.com/?page_id=14


Aganetha Dyck http://www.aganethadyck.ca/

Claire Zeisler, http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=5541

Sheila Hicks http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheila_Hicks

Andrea Noeske-Porada http://www.kunst-im-souterrain.de/