

## Review "Lieux de memoire" by Joe Lewis

"Lieux de memoire" June 9th -24th 2010,  
Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay,  
6052, boulevard Monk Montreal, Quebec

2009 Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf June 24- September 27, 2009 La Chevrotiere Mill, Deschambault-Grondines, Quebec.

Penney Burton Flax into Gold, 2009, hand made linen paper vessels, organic and inorganic harvested in the Portneuf region, linen thread Flax fibers are amongst the oldest fibre crops in the world. The use of flax for the production of linen goes back at least to ancient Egyptian times. Dyed flax fibers found in a cave in Dzudzuana (prehistoric Georgia) have been dated to 30,000 years ago. Pictures on tombs and temple walls at Thebes depict flowering flax plants. The use of flax fibre in the manufacturing of cloth in northern Europe dates back to Neolithic times. In North America, flax was introduced by the Puritans. 1.

The installation of "Lieux de memoire" at the Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay in Montreal was curated by Montreal based Denis Longchamps. Denis who is an Art historian, independent curator and publisher / managing editor of "Cahiers métiers d'art/ Craft Journal" brought together the work of twelve craft artisans working in ceramics, fibre, glass and mixed materials for this exhibition which was one of the three exhibitions of the 2009 third edition of the "Biennale internationale du lin de Portneuf". This Montreal showing was the second installation of this exhibition and my first opportunity to see it. The biennale was instigated by the "Comite de mise en valeur du lin" a non-profit organization founded in 1988 to safeguard and promote knowledge related to the processing of flax and linen using traditional methods along with the artistic, cultural, social and economic development in the Portneuf a flax growing region outside of Quebec City. The biennale brings together designer makers, craft practitioners and artist from the worlds of fashion, fine arts, traditional and contemporary crafts to celebrate flax as a material of boundless possibilities. Dawn McNutt "Imagining the Past" Linen Sampler with drawn thread work, 65cm. long x 36cm. wide, Glazed antique window frame, 120cm. long x 64cm. wide x 5 cm deep, Sepia tone transparencies

In this "Craft" identified exhibition, five of the eleven are working with linen textiles; of these, three are using cloth they have woven. I will speak of these three first. Each of them uses distinct, multiple and different approaches to "marking" / patterning the cloth: by dyeing the yarn or, thermal transfer, weave structures, and presentation. Two have created mixed media installations: Dawn McNutt and Vita Plume, while the third, Mackenzie Frere, hangs his plain woven cloth on the wall.

"Imagining the Past" is the title of Dawn McNutt's piece. She is an east coast artisan known for her sculptural basketry, and her work here is apropos of the theme of "place of memory". A mixed media piece consisting of three components: a Linen Sampler with drawn thread work, 65cm. long x 36cm. wide, woven by her in 1980, a Glazed antique window frame, 120cm. long x 64cm. wide x 5 cm deep taken from a house which is now her studio that was built, unbeknown to her until a 2006 renovation, by her great-great-grandfather, Alexander James Reid, in 1838. Sepia tone transparencies of the artist's ancestors are imposed on the frame's glazing.

Dawn McNutt's piece is created from family artifacts relating to known facts to illustrate memories. In her artist's statement she provides the provenance of all the pieces including the linen yarn used to weave the sampler, noting: "I used the 125 year old linen, grown processed and spun by Mrs. Charles Mackenzie of Watervale, Pictou County". [Where McNutt was born]. "I bought several skeins of the ancient linen From Mrs. Anna Cluny of Anna's Antiques in Lyon's Brook, Pictou County; I kept imagining the ancient lady who did all that spinning... maybe she too was an ancestor. I asked about her, and Mrs. Cluny was able to establish the origin of the yarn. Linen sampler with drawn thread work 65cm. long x 36cm. wide (25 1/2" x 14") woven in 1980 by Dawn McNutt

Mackenzie Frere's piece, "Recollect", consists of five woven panels with red vertical stripes. It is hung by dowels on the wall. He has used a Japanese method of dyeing called "Kasuri" which is a precision tied resist spot dyeing of the weft prior to weaving which creates the surface design. This work relies on the molecular nature of the fibres to hold "memory". In textile parlance, memory refers to the tension created by the process of spinning and the fibre trying to return to its original [remembered] state. Think of "a place of memory" as a metaphor in Mackenzie's process of dyeing; Think of spots of colour along the weft thread as an event. His the act of weaving has re-collected the different components, date, participants, location of this event in layer upon layer as the spot died areas of the weft thread match up and become a vertical stripe. The vertical stripe on the cloth appears like a stain, rather than a bold defined graphic strip. It is a slightly out of focus recollection -- more nostalgic than historical like McNutt's piece. The simplicity of appearance belies the precision and the skill with which they have been made. Mackenzie Frere Recollect 1, linen, turkey red, weft kasuri, five panels each 32 x 149 cm, 2008/2009

The third weaver in the exhibition, Vita Plume, presented a mix of jacquard woven cloth panels and linen garments lined with thermal printed textiles. The linings are made from found/ store bought/ industrial produced cloth which has been thermal printed, cut into vertical or horizontal strips then rewoven to reconstitute the original printed textile.

"Dreams from My Mother" is filled with imagery; the jacquard panels which resemble a traditional damask "tablecloth" has traditional cross stitch design woven patterning through which disembodied faces float, some of these faces appear in the lining of the garments. This piece presents a story/ dream which has been told and retold until it has become embedded into the "fabric of life." Obviously, what they are is unknown; they are just there.

Vita Plume's Dreams from My Mother, jacquard woven cloth, 5 panel and constructed garments lined with thermal printed textiles which been cut into inch wide strips and rewoven.

The work of these three makers using linen thread as the base of their work, manipulating it through weaving processes in different ways, and marking the woven cloth at different steps before and during construction, shows a small range of the possibilities of woven linen cloth quite apart from their placement and meaning into the context of the theme of the exhibition. As a medium and a subject that is central to the "Biennale international du Lin de Portneuf," linen is incredibly flexible as a material and as a concept. Since 2005 the work of nearly 100 artist, designers and makers working in fashion, contemporary fine arts and crafts have been presented at this Biennale. Other artists in this exhibition include: Sarah Alford: hot glue, J. Penney Burton: hand made paper; Monique Giard; Glass, Rosie Godbout: tapestry; Veronika Horlik: ceramics; Michèle Lapointe: cast glass; Mireille Racine: free standing textile constructions; Alian Tara: letter press book. Liz Williamson, woven line rags. Michèle Lapointe. "peau de mille bêtes/Skin of a Thousand Beasts", cast glass pillows, printed linen paper, wood, inflated paper doll parts To see more images of the exhibition as installed during the 2009 Biennale and find out what this years line up is vist their website.

<http://www.biennaledulin.ca/>

Watch Video from the Biennale on line at Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/biennaledulin>

The 2011 edition of "Biennale international du lin de Portneuf" is coming up in June. you can find up dates on their facebook page. Rosie Godbout Poem Textile IV ou Perimetre irregulier de ma mémoire 2009

These practitioners are part of social networking sites such as Facebook and Linked IN, some have websites and /or

Blogs. Links: Curator: Denis Longchamps "Cahiers métiers d'art/ Craft Journal"

<http://www.craftjournal.ca/> Sarah Alford: <http://sarahalford.com/>

J. Penney Burton: Burton's "Virtual Connections" international facebook fibre project

Mackenzie Frere <http://www.mackenziefrere.com/>

Monique Giard; Rosie Godbout: <http://www.godboutartaporter.ca/>

Veronika Horlik: Michèle Lapointe web page at Glass Art Association of Canadian Dawn McNutt

<http://www.dawnmacnutt.com/>

Vita Plume

Mireille Racine: <http://www.mireilleracine.com/> website under construction

Alian Tara: Designer Book Binders

Liz Williamson: <http://lizwilliamson.com.au/> <http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/about-us/staff/30>