

Reviews:

Montreal: Small Talk: by J.Penny Burton
around by joelewis

Calgary: Meta Incognita by Mackenzie Frère

Toronto: walk

Montreal: Small Talk: by J.Penny Burton I first saw Small Talk exhibited at the Ontario College of Art and Design Student Gallery from October 11th – November 4th, 2006, in conjunction with the Tenth Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America, held at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. This exhibit presented the work of students from the Alberta College of Art and Design, the Anna Templeton Centre, Capilano College, le Centre Design & Impression Textile de Montreal, Concordia University, the Kootenay School of the Arts at Selkirk College, the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, the Ontario College of Art and Design, Sheridan College of Craft & Design, and the Sir Wilfred Grenfell College. Erin Ciulla, OCAD, Phase 1 Essentially somewhat of a snapshot of what is happening in the fibre and textile programs across Canada, the show was coordinated by textile and fibre faculty members Robin Muller from NSCAD and Eva Ennist from OCAD. Each school had the opportunity to choose work from ten of their students, with the title Small Talk referring to the size restriction that was placed upon each work which could be no larger than twelve inches by twelve inches I first viewed the exhibition during the opening night at the OCAD gallery, and I found the work to be overcrowded and not displayed to its best advantage, however I may have been unduly influenced by the crowds of people present at the vernissage which made manoeuvring around the gallery space somewhat difficult. I had the opportunity to view Small Talk once again during its showing February 1 – 28th, 2007 at the Montreal Centre for Contemporary Textiles. This expansive setting more suitably showcased the 100 works of art created from fibre materials and techniques, and allowed for a more relaxed viewing experience. The student work from the Alberta College of Art and Design was created utilizing fibre techniques including tapestry, weaving, surface design, basketry and embroidery. Siri McCormick's Fjord, a wall mounted light fixture first caught my eye as it was evident that a number of surface design techniques had been combined to great effect. Sporting blue, green and purple hued fabric, the richly decorated surface was layered so when the light was turned on, there was a real sense of multi-dimensionality to the work. Sixteen baskets by Janice Wu were laid out in a grid format, in which each miniature basket was placed upon foiled Japanese papers. From afar, the size, colors and shapes reminded me of pastries or petit-fours from days of old, however upon closer inspection, it is evident that each piece is made from a variety of basketry techniques, assorted organic matter, and a selection of yarns and multi-coloured wires. Barbara Sutherland's Naskup Hot Springs embroidery on linen is somewhat simple in color and form, yet intriguing nonetheless. The sparse framing allows the viewer to be drawn into the whorls of the water, creating a potential space for reflection. The Anna Templeton Centre located in St. John's, Newfoundland was represented by different types of needle works. Often hand dyed, the yarns and threads were used in hand and machine embroideries, appliqué, and in creating three dimensional forms. Andrea Vincent created Lady Day with hand dyed silk roving. The feminine central figure is surrounded by archetypal symbols and shapes, some from astrological signs, while others appear organic in nature. Peggy Tremblett's No Worries, No Pain, Just Stay In appeared to be a knit and stuffed vertebral column, complete with rib appendages presented on a wooden support. The title hints at the perils of corporeal displacement and our lack of control over our own bodies. In a tongue – in – cheek look at domestic life. Allison Book, Anna Templeton Centre, She has sayings like, “If your vacuum was blue, you would be too” (LR) Allison Book's work She has sayings like, “If your vacuum was blue, you would be too” had been heavily overstitched. Made of only cotton and embroidery floss, the excess stitching takes on a life of its own, and each coloured area seems to be made of dense textural fabrics. In general, the works from Capilano College demonstrate a quite a wide range of textile techniques such as embroidery, appliqué work, tapestry, basketry, felting, and dyeing amongst others. There is also a nice mix between two and three dimensional pieces. Andy Warhol on Alice Neel's Couch by Rachelle Roberts is a fascinating if somewhat unfinished reverse appliqué work. There is a melancholy feel to the stitched drawing, which accurately reproduced Neel's painting of Warhol from 1970. Also in the figurative realm, Tara Seekamp created Isis by pigment painting on cotton. She then enhanced the form by using freeform machine embroidery to call forth the figure from its ground. Referencing goddess lore, the work is cornered by ankh symbols and also pays homage to the moon and the stars. Isis by Tara Seekamp pigment painting on cotton, freeform machine embroidery (jpb) In Bloom by Robyn Stevens is a gorgeous and lush piece in which the blossoms jump right out at you. The hand spun nubs of yarn in purple, fuchsia and cranberry tones really made this piece come alive. Three students from le Centre design et impression textile de Montréal displayed their mastery of surface design in a series of exploratory works. Pascale Faubert's pieces La Fôret I et II transformed silk and hemp, while Marie-Ève Gauthier utilized wax, varnish, acrylic and stitched components in Untitled I et II. Concordia University students exhibited work made from three dimensional weaving with wire, embroidery, cross stitch, screen printing, dye sublimation and machine embroidery. Concordia fibres students are known for being very conceptual in approach, and in Untitled – Found object Keiko Saito presented a pink plush teddy bear, upon which she had embroidered a message with a somewhat sinister feel to it. Untitled – Found object Keiko Saito, pink plush teddy bear, embroidery (jpb) The discarded and un-stuffed bear brings to mind childhood loss, and evokes a curiosity as to its contents. Pascale Larouche – Georgia employed almost day-glow colors in her cross stitch For Your Safety which portrays images from an airline safety leaflet. This work is especially pertinent in these turbulent times with increased security and ever threatening safety concerns being so closely linked to airline travel. Kate Hampel's crisp white hand towel stated both I love colonialism and the world at your fingertips

since 1492. This clever and in your face piece was created by machine embroidery and dye sublimation on ribbon, demonstrating the potential usage of two digital technologies in contemporary fibre art.

The Montreal Center for Contemporary Textiles only presented the work of two students, however, with their obvious technical skills and their innovative use of materials, I found myself wishing there had been more. Marie Pierre Daigle created *Fire* from copper, polyester and morelli glass. The translucency produced by combining the glass tendrils with the wire highlighted Daigle's impeccable technical form, originality in execution, and formal qualities of the work, making it literally shine. In *Ma vie est un jardin de givre*, Dahlia Milon presented two woven three dimensional forms that seemed to be converging and growing together. Sitting on a mirror, interesting shadows were projected onto the wall, lending to a feeling of expansion of the synthetic organic forms.

The students from the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design created their works by weaving, hand dyeing, silk screening, applying photo transfers to fabric, and painting on silk. In *Longings 1 & 2* Michelle Beaulieu combined found materials such as vintage fabrics with actual photographs, and text. She skilfully distressed, burned and freely layered these materials in her pieces which evoke times gone by.

Fibres from Nature by Ellen Guthrie, paper wasps' nest (jpb)
 "Fibres from Nature", by Ellen Guthrie makes it truly difficult to determine where the artist's interventions with paper and an actual wasp's nest began and ended. The piece seems to be seamlessly blended together, with even the netting around the basket core looking like it belongs there.

Stacey James created *Fibre Hazard* out of mechanical wire and broken mirror glass. The controlled chaos of the different sized wires randomly weaving in and out is pleasing to the eye, but the shards of glass have a somewhat jarring effect, haphazardly placed in between the wires and almost daring us to engage with them

Fibre Hazard Stacey James mechanical wire, broken mirror glass. (jpb)

Photo

Credit: for small talk provided by J. Penny Burton (jpb) or Lino Ragno, Image Curator, OCAD

Calgary: *Meta Incognita* by Mackenzie Frère

1. Frobisher — cotton, threads, 17.5 x 14"

Artist: Wendy Klotz

The January opening of *Meta Incognita* at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium coincided with the world premier of Calgary Opera's new work *Frobisher*. The original production was the inspiration for the sixty-five pieces in this ambitious exhibition by the fibre arts group *Articulation*. Artists were invited to create an exhibition based on the theme and setting of *Frobisher*, for display in two spaces at the Jubilee. Members of the group hail from British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, and are graduates of the City & Guilds of London course in Design and Embroidery. Literally translated, *Meta Incognita* means "limits unknown" and was chosen by the artists to reflect not only Martin Frobisher's search for the Northwest Passage, but also the group's ongoing exploration of the visual arts. The result is an impressive range of work, from an intimate embroidered portrait of Frobisher to an array colourfully dyed and stitched works capturing the beauty of the aurora borealis.

Wendy Klotz's portrait of Martin Frobisher is a machine-embroidered drawing in black thread on plain white cotton. As a piece of machine embroidery it is anomalous for its undecorated and restrained execution. Klotz's straightforward depiction of the explorer contrast sharply with Frobisher's Elizabethan finery. He looks to the left as though he is uncomfortable standing still. In its simplicity, this portrait in thread stands out in a group of more extravagant offerings like Gloria S. Daly's *Polvs Articvs*, a multilayered reinterpretation of an Elizabethan-era map of the north, or Donna Clement's richly coloured work *All that Glitters is Not Gold*. Both of these pieces demonstrate the technical skill and ability with materials shared by many of the artists in the exhibition.

2 *Polvs Articvs* — cotton, organza, pearl cotton thread, 85 x 85"

Artist: Gloria S. Daly

3 *All That Glitters is Not Gold* — various textiles, 54 x 80"

Artist: Donna Clement

Artist Lesley Turner chose to focus on Frobisher's contact with the Inuit people in several of her pieces for *Meta Incognita*. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is *Summer Progress*.

4 *Summer Progress* — fabric, threads, paint, beads, 14 x 12"

Artist: Lesley Turner

In this piece, Turner contrasts Queen Elizabeth's annual summer progress when she would visit country houses, receiving gifts from her hosts, with the tragic experience of the Inuit woman captured by Frobisher and taken to England as a curiosity. *Summer Progress* is a small framed piece of painted, appliquéd fabric with an unusually placed looped string of pearls almost escaping the frame at the top. A simplified woman's face appears at the bottom the frame pressed flat, crowded by elaborately patterned, Elizabethan-style fabric. It is a claustrophobic composition, echoing the unsettling theme of the work. In her description of this piece, Turner reminds us that the Inuit woman's "enforced summer progress" resulted in her death from the measles in only a few months.

As a unique collaboration between Calgary Opera and the fibre arts, *Meta Incognita* deserves notice. However, there are only a few pieces that provide more than a surface exploration of the exhibit's subject matter. Many of the works displayed read more as meticulously-crafted demonstrations of the artists' virtuosity with thread than an artistic engagement with the operatic theme of the exhibition. It is puzzling why several of these pieces were included in the show. A more focused selection of work from this prolific group might have corralled the multiplicity of viewpoints into a more cohesive exhibition. The cramped spacing and careless mounting of individual pieces also posed an unnecessary challenge to the presentation of the exhibition, particularly in the lower space where pieces are hung from a thick-gauge chain that distracts from even the most exuberant and beautiful works. Fortunately for *Articulation*, heaven is in the details and there are plenty of discrete moments of aesthetic delight on offer here, like *Safe Haven* by Rebecca Patterson. With its sophisticated pairing of subtle colouring and complex surface texture *Patterson's* abstracted log cabin is echoed in the background, pieced in a log cabin quilt block pattern. Without

literally referencing Frobisher, the artist has managed to create an evocative image of isolation in the desolate landscape of Meta Incognita. Meta Incognita will travel east for an exhibition at the Mary E. Blac Gallery in Halifax Nova Scotia at a future date.

5 Safe Haven – hand-dyed silk, poly-cotton, plastic, beads, 16 x 22”

Artist: Rebecca Patterson Artist Websites Gloria Daly: <http://www.studiogart.com> Donna Clement: <http://www.donnaclement.com>