

Connective Tissue/ Tissu Conjonctif

Musée des Maîtres et artisans du Québec

July 28 – September 2 2007

Curator J. Penney Burton.

Review by joelewis

Current trends in Museum presentations are geared towards putting the permanent collection in front of the general public and getting it out of storage. One way of doing this has been to give contemporary artists access to the collection for research and inspiration, then presenting the new work along with the work that has influenced it. J. Penney Burton has done this in reverse, while bucking the trend of re-contextualizing textiles in order to legitimize them as fine art. With this show, the work of twelve artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds with distinctive art/craft practices has been paired with pieces from the collection of the Musée des Maîtres et artisans du Québec.

Each artist is grounded in a mixture of well established textile production, surface design and embellishment methods. While addressing the older traditional work belonging to the museum, but not necessarily the work ultimately paired with theirs, they have produced thoughtful deeply personal pieces. This new work reaches back to family and accesses their own ethnic traditions and in many ways magnifies elements that were already a well established component of each artist's personal vocabulary. The historic works Penney Burton has chosen to exemplify the materiality of the contemporary work, in most instances, stand alone as fine examples of what they are. Looking at the show as a whole, it actually works beyond what is put forward as a comparative look at the materiality of and connection between textile practices and works past and present.

The Exhibition is presented in two groupings, the contemporary work in one area the work from the collection in another. When the work is spoken of as being "paired with", it is the material and technique that is being compared and not physical proximity within the exhibit. Each pairing is simple enough, although in some cases, they are a bit confusing. The material from the collection is not as well documented as one would hope. The First Nations pieces have an anthropological grounding. The rest of the pieces lack desirable levels of background – probably due to the fact that these are ordinary and local textile pieces. Although well crafted, they have become dislocated from their owners/ families; they are without history.

Draperie / Drapery, n.d. Soie, coton / Silk, coton 235 x 184 cm MMAQ, 2-00157-2

The appliquéd vintage printed table cloth by Andrea Vander Kooij, in "dialogue" with an embroidered silk drapery, has a common imagery of birds and other natural elements. The drapery without a history is, quite possibly, Cantonese silk embroidered circa 1900. The design is magnificent with, animals, birds, butterflies, flowers, trees, and architectural elements. It is very similar to shawls from China of the same era that were trade goods for the European/western market. It has a muted palette of buff, ecru, gold and dusty mauve with silvery grey, brown and green accents. The prominent image is a pheasant and, like the shawls, it has a long macramé fringe. The blue and white palette of Vander Kooij's "the Reluctant Nightingale" piece is reminiscent of the Delft pottery of her Dutch ancestry. The tablecloth itself is a family piece and retains the stains of meals served upon it. The printed surface is embellished with numerous silhouettes of various birds in flight. the title a reference to the fact that her grandmother never quite gave up her resistance to immigrating to Canada in the mid 1940s after the Second World War.

Vander Kooij at work on "the Reluctant Nightingale" in her studio, photo by:Kate Fellerath

Within this show there are four pieces using hair, which, when looked at as a group, represent 4 distinct ethnic groups and methods of production. They also represent traditions of Memento Mori, in which human hair is fashioned into jewelry and other keepsake objects. Sarah Quinton in her introductory essay to "Told and Retold" writes "Hair can be seen as a metaphor for the body: in its presence (and absence) we find ourselves considering its many (but seldom spoken) physical, spiritual, emotional, sexual and cultural associations; It can be twisted, braided, woven, plaited." Its use in object making is cross cultural and has a continuous presence over centuries.

Objet rituel perlé, 19e siècle Beaded ritual object , / 19th century Peau de chevreuil, crin, verre, tendon, coton / Deer skin, hair, glass, tendon, cotton 42.5 x 9.7 cm MMAQ, 1982.8

1. " [A] possible fetish object...an animal which resembles a lizard that has been handcrafted from animal hide and glass beads, likely by a first nation's artisan. Added to this is a "pony" tail of shockingly red horse hair ...";

2. The lizard is paired with Ashley Miller's "Tail Wind" which consist of long strands of horse tail hair sewn in a continuing curving line that snakes itself across the 158.5 X 81 cm 932" x 60") of light weight cloth. This piece is representative of the wind blowing across the Arizona desert and is about "fleeting experiences, which have become lodged in my psyche, and help me to remember where I came from and who I am" Cilice / Hair-shirt, 19e siècle / 19th century Crin de chameau, lin, coton / Camel hair, flax, cotton 39.5 x 35.5 cm MMAQ, NN 330

3. The Hair Shirt, a 19th century piece of Camel Hair, flax and cotton, is an object by itself. It is 39.5 X 35.5 cm with a square opening to place over the head. It is considered a garment of Christian origin (Roman and various post reformation sects) to be worn for self mortification.

4. The hair shirt is "paired" with Jihee Min piece "i as my Grandmother" which consists of her grandmother's rice washing bowl filled with pieced brightly coloured stuff/ sculpted balls with strands of hair. Jihee Min is a Korean who immigrated to Canada with her parents as a child. The balls are embroidered with strands of her own hair

This exhibition provided an opportunity to see an interesting mixture of approaches to working with textiles and fibres--traditional and contemporary. It provided a chance to see the skill, craft and workmanship that is necessary to work with these materials. The visual impact created by the management of colour and design allows access to the personal meaning of the contemporary work, while permitting speculation into the meaning and "stories" behind the historical. The speculation-into-meaning that these works require of us made this show a success.

Along with the artist mentioned above the show included Anne Francoise Wauthy, Claudia Almansa, Dolores Migwans, Emilie Desmeules, Helle Derrick, Sherry Farrell & Racette, and Ying Gao. All presenting an interesting range of intriguing work.

Joe Lewis Musée des Maîtres et artisans du Québec

http://www.mmaq.qc.ca/index_en.htm

This museum is located in the former Presbyterian Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, built by the architect Frederic Lawford in 1867. It was located on Dorchester Blvd. (now René-Lévesque) at the corner of rue Sainte-Monique. Considered the most beautiful neo-gothic church in the city, in 1931, the Church was expropriated to make way for the construction of a train station. It was saved from destruction by the Pères de Sainte-Croix. It was taken apart stone by stone and moved to the grounds of the Collège Saint-Laurent. There it was rebuilt as an almost exact replica of the original by the architect, Lucien Parent, to ready it for its new vocation as a Catholic chapel. It went through one more change of use and opened in 1979 as the Musée des Maîtres et artisans du Québec.

The Museum's collection of more than 7000 objects relating to traditional arts and crafts has given the building a new orientation. In the Fall of 2002, the Museum was redesigned by the Marc Julien architectural firm; the interior layout and brought out its original beauty while raising it to the standards required for a museum. Meanwhile, a new permanent exhibition called From Master's Hands opened in March 2003

Images provided by the MMAQ and used with permission

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MMAQ, 2-00157-2

Objet rituel perlé, 19e siècle, Beaded ritual object, / 19th century, Peau de chevreuil, crin, verre, tendon, coton / Deer skin, hair, glass, tendon, cotton, 42.5 x 9.7 cm

MMAQ, 1982.8

Cilice / Hair-shirt, 19e siècle / 19th century Crin de chameau, lin, coton / Camel hair, flax, cotton 39.5 x 35.5 cm

MMAQ, NN 330

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Andrea Vander Kooij working on the Reluctant Nightingale: photo by:Kate Fellerath

Jihee Min: i as my grandma, 2007 Techniques used: sewing, Medium: fabric, cotton, hair, grandma's bowl used to wash rice grains Size:15 inch x 15 inch 40 inch)

Photo Credit: Jihee Min

Ashley Miller, Tail Wind: 2007, Techniques used: sewing, Medium: Fabric and horse hair Size: 32" x 60"

Photo Credit: Ashley Miller