

THE CRAFT FACTOR

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Hatmaker, Hatmaker, Make Me a Hat

Every time I visit Granville Island in Vancouver, and it's not that often, Edie's Hat shop is packed. People are trying on hats and making faces in the mirrors, catering to harmless and inexpensive fantasies. It is actually difficult to get into the shop, it is so jam packed full of hats!

This spring when I was there, the shop was overflowing with reasonably-priced, broad-brimmed straw hats. They were lovely, and flattering on many heads. I resisted the urge to buy one for a couple reasons: one, straw hats do not protect your skin from ultraviolet radiation, and two, straw hats do not travel well packed in a suitcase or bag—I would have had to wear the hat on the plane back to snowy Saskatoon.

The hats that interested me more were Edie's soft-cloth hats. They were more expensive, but also more distinctive. I am sure most people buy and wear soft-cloth hats because they feel that the hats express some aspect of their character. Ironically, if you live in Saskatchewan, you will find that a funky soft cloth hat is difficult to obtain, unless you make one yourself. Although our climate of extremes and our long, grey, colourless winters are two reasons to wear hats, most people on the Prairies are very conservative about what other people might see on their heads!

The gift shop in the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina sometimes carries hats from the Vancouver-based producer, That Hat. That Hat is the home-based partnership of Candace Sutherland, originally from Weyburn, and Kitty Davies from England. Sutherland handles the business and marketing side, and Davies is the designer. The two women produce a spring and fall line each year, amounting to approximately two thousand hats. They cut out all the materials themselves and contract out the sewing to home sewers in Vancouver.

Sutherland admits that the market in Vancouver is flooded with many soft-fabric hat producers with very limited production in the local area. That Hat only sells wholesale, but not just to places like Edie's and the MacKenzie. In addition to having an agent who represents them throughout western Canada, Sutherland and Davies are currently expanding into England with That Hat UK.



By SUSAN CLARK

That Hat tries to compete not only through an expanded market but also by producing new lines twice a year. Sutherland refers to their hats as "whimsical and fashion-forward." "What often makes our hats unique," says Sutherland, "are the special tassels and fringe we use." The greatest percentage of their hats are made for children.

"Most of our hats are sold in gift ware and hat stores, where Grannies buy gifts, rather than kids stores," explains Davies. Children's hats retail for around \$18.00 to \$26.00 and adult hats around \$35.00. Both women decry ball caps and \$2.00 hats from Taiwan. They have found that the spring season is

very competitive but the fall season is their best for sales.

In Toronto, the name Rachel MacHenry is synonymous with funky hats. MacHenry is a former modern dancer who performed with the Toronto Dance Theatre. A series of injuries led to her work on set production, which eventually led her to try her hand at knitwear design. She designs garments for companies and also under her own name.

MacHenry used to produce a line of brightly-coloured hats for kids. She would make hundreds of hats every season by using a knitting machine for the flat band that goes around the head and then hand-knitting the rest. Although the demand for her hats was always increasing, MacHenry eventually

became exhausted by large-scale production work and now makes one-of-a-kind pieces and smaller production groups.

MacHenry has an extensive exhibition record, and two of her hats are part of the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Two years ago, MacHenry organized and curated a series of exhibitions for Toronto's Queen's Quay, including a show of hats made by artists.

In 1992, MacHenry received an Ontario Arts Council Grant for the research and study of knitting in Great Britain. On this study trip, she was shown family treasures passed down from generation to generation. On subsequent travels in Nepal, MacHenry was struck by the diversity and richness of the indigenous traditional textiles and their continued importance in everyday life. One can easily see in MacHenry's work the influences of both the traditional British Fair Isle knitting patterns and the exotic and colourful knitting and weaving from Nepal and surrounding areas.

MacHenry says in her artist's statement that "Hats have a special significance in most cultures. As a housing for our dreams, imagination, hopes, and reasoning facilities, the head deserves special protection; most religions tie the covering and uncovering of the head into religious or spiritual practice."

Soft-cloth or knitted hat production relies on basic sewing or knitting skill, creative patterns, and the availability of suitable materials. The milliner's art is nearly lost. Very few people are trained in the specialized shaping of felt and other materials. The milliner's tools are becoming relics of our past.

It is possible to buy prefabricated hat forms and cover them with cloth, as is often done to outfit wedding parties. In addition, patterns for soft-cloth hats are occasionally featured in women's and sewing magazines.

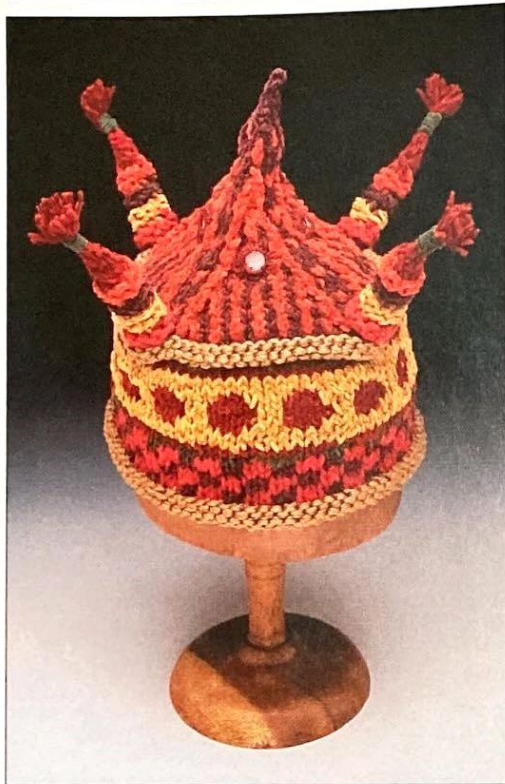
Candace Sutherland of That Hat is fortunate in that her parents operate a fabric store in Weyburn and thus are able to assist her in locating suppliers for special trims and findings.

Hats can be fabricated from a wide range of materials, from flat felt to dyed leather. Working with leather requires a heavy-duty sewing machine, but the material is often easier to handle than cloth, which tends to fray and stretch out of shape. Unfortunately, leather hats are too hot to wear in the summer sun.

In Saskatoon, one can occasionally find homemade, soft-cloth hats in vintage clothing stores. These "first generation" pieces rarely measure up to consumer expectation. Hats not only have to fit the head and flatter the face but also must be constructed in a way that does not interfere with the design. That Hat designs often feature a unique



ABOVE TOP Handmade, soft-cloth hat by That Hat, Vancouver.
ABOVE BOTTOM Installation view of "The Hat Show" at Queen's Quay, Toronto, organized by Rachel MacHenry. Photo: Tom Sandler.
OPPOSITE Handmade, soft-cloth hat by That Hat, Vancouver. Photos courtesy of That Hat.

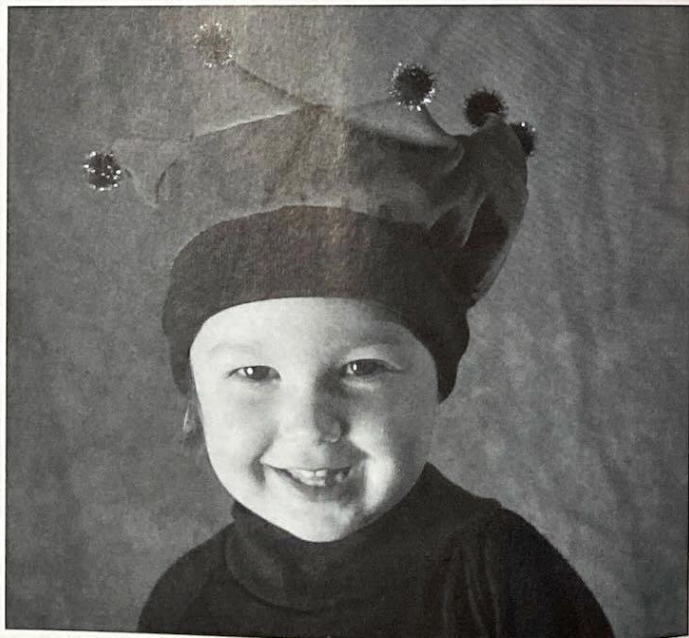


ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT Hand-knitted hats by Rachel MacHenry. Photo: Jeremy Jones. BELOW RIGHT Handmade soft-cloth hat by That Hat, Vancouver. Photo courtesy of That Hat.

band of ribbing on the inside designed to keep the hat firmly on the child's head. The sewing on any hat must be impeccable: seams that don't quite match, or are not sewn straight, become incredibly obvious on a piece of head gear. And because the head is such a focal point, materials must be chosen carefully. For example, the use of a second-rate fabric, such as a velvet without a rich enough pile or nap, will almost always diminish the impact of a design.

There is a whole world of creativity out there for anyone with a yearning to express themselves or the stamina to search for unique ready-made hats. Although people in Saskatchewan are conservative dressers, a hat is one small fantasy we can still afford, even if we only wear it in our own backyard, or behind closed doors! □

Susan Clark is a librarian and fibre artist who this summer moved from Saskatoon to Japan.



From Inner Eye to Public View:



Designing with Kaija Sanelma Harris

By DOROTHY BORAN

Everyone who saw Kaija Sanelma Harris's recent show, "Tapestries 1990-1993," at The Mendel in Saskatoon will have been impressed not only by the breathtaking size, subtle colours, careful detail, and appealing subject matter of the works presented but also by the artist's mastery of a traditional craft. While every craftsman may have experienced occasionally those wonderful moments when everything seems to fall together effortlessly, many of us regularly depend on luck to determine if we will end up with a "keeper" or another "experiment." And we wonder: what separates the struggling amateur from the successful pro-

fessional? Is public recognition and acceptance also a matter of luck?

Casey Stengel said, "Luck is the residue of design." He was referring to baseball, of course, but his statement could be applied to any human endeavour. Good things have come to Harris not because she has sat and waited for them like Patience on a monument, but because she has worked steadily to gain the skills necessary to recognize and take advantage of opportunities. For Harris, weaving is more than a way to make a living; it is a way of life. Uncomfortable with the idea of

barriers and borders, Harris describes the process of going from an image seen with her inner eye to a finished piece hanging in public view on a gallery wall not in terms of a series of discrete steps but as a complex, non-linear process of transformation and discovery.

Harris's holistic view of creativity is clearly evident in her home, where studio and living areas freely intermingle. From her basement where she makes warps and brushes afghans,

ABOVE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Chronological sequence of drawings for *Crosswinds I* (1992), by Kaija Sanelma Harris [see back cover].



to the main floor where she draws, reads, and thinks, to the second floor studio and third floor finishing space, Harris is never far from her work. It is not something that can be put away, out of sight, until the next time she is ready to work. Even the bathtub is occasionally used for soaking fabric.

At present, Harris's work can be arranged into three main groups. The first group consists of large-scale, wall-mounted tapestries in wool and silk, like the ones that were on view at The Mendel. The second group is comprised of free-hanging, double-cloth pieces meant to be viewed from both front and back. The third group includes afghans or throws. Harris, however, is careful to point out that some things are common to all of her work: idea, research and drawing, time, technical and practical knowledge, the ability to be flexible, and finally, the courage to edit your own work.

The idea for a weaving or other art project must consider content/subject/meaning, method and materials, colour, texture, size/scale, realism/symbolism/abstraction, finishing, function, and display. When making design choices, however, Harris does not

necessarily look at these basic elements in isolation or in a particular sequence or think of them as equal in importance. Instead, she allows the elements to overlap and shift, depending on the particular stage in the process where she happens to be and the type of project she is working on.

Harris's ideas come from a wide variety of sources. An eclectic reader, Harris is especially intrigued by obscure books about myths and legends. Two titles she has been reading recently are *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power*, by Barbara G. Walker, and *Kalevala: The Land of Heroes*, a book of Finnish legends, myths, and epics, compiled by Elias Lönnrot and translated by W. F. Kirby. *The Crone* has already become part of Harris's inspiration for a future work that will incorporate the image of an amaryllis at various stages of growth and decline relating to a series of maturing faces.

Harris likes to incorporate cycles and seasons in her work. A bowl of tomatoes goes from green to gold to orange to red; a butterfly emerges from a cocoon from a larva from an egg. "So too, there are life cycles of people," says Harris. "We like to control life;

we should let go and accept change."

In some of her works, Harris explores the meanings associated with various cultural symbols. "Drawings of a bird costume from a children's play [see above, top left] provided one of the starting points in the process of designing the twin tapestries *Dawn Wings* and *Evening Shadows*," recalls Harris. Books with photographs of birds taking off or landing were consulted. Is it obvious from wing position whether or not a bird is landing or taking off? No, but watch the feet. A new series of drawings was born. Time to take walks on the prairie and watch birds and the sun setting and rising. Harris remembered a story she had heard on CBC radio about the young William Blake telling his parents when they were in a forest that he saw angels in the trees. The idea of angel wings was added to the mental mix, and then Harris turned to dictionaries: English, Swedish, Finnish. How do thematically-significant words translate back and forth? What are the shapes and letters of the words? What are their sounds? More drawings were tried out, some with elements that did not show up in the final design.

Although Harris has had formal training

RIGHT Working drawing for *Dawn Wings* (1990), by Kaija Sanelma Harris.

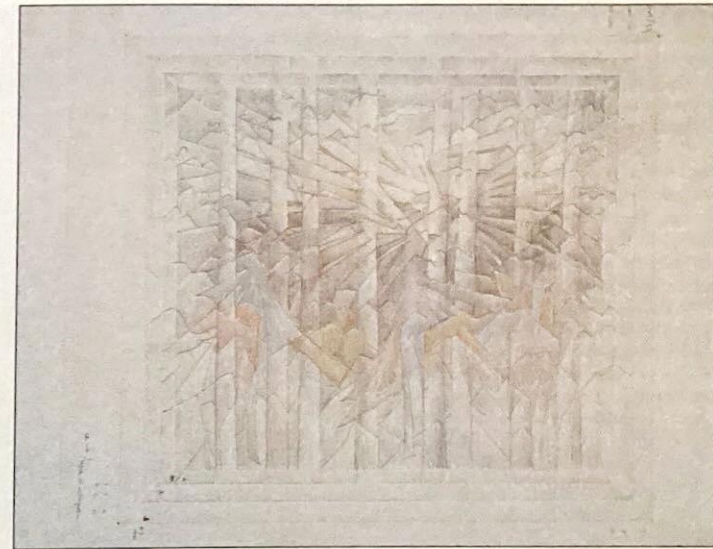
OPPOSITE Drawings for *Dawn Wings* and *Evening Shadows*, by Kaija Sanelma Harris.

in design and weaving, and over thirty years experience, she continues to polish her artistic skills by taking the occasional class. In the 1970s, she took basic drawing from Lorna Russell through the University of Saskatchewan Extension Division. In the early 1980s, Ann Newdigate gave a design class, also through Extension. One of the exercises was to create a collage using strips of torn magazine pages. Harris thought the torn edges, white and irregular, made interesting shapes, so after the class, she recreated, in coloured pencil, the shapes and colours of her original collage. She wanted to weave the design into a large-scale wallhanging but could not find a technique that would reproduce the irregular white edges of the torn paper.

Five years later, Harris was able to continue the design process. She had overcome the problem of technique and began work on a piece that combined a horizontal bottom section with a vertical top. After weaving the bottom, she began work on the top and had only woven about an inch when she discovered that the technique she had developed was no longer producing the effect she wanted.

She had to make a decision. She could abandon the project, or abandon the technique, or change the design. Abandoning the project would have meant a waste of time and an expensive throw away. Abandoning the technique would have meant losing the irregular torn paper shapes that had inspired the design in the first place. Harris decided to change the design. She unwove the part that was not working, flipped her design, and redrew it. She then continued to weave, in reverse order, more or less what she had woven before. She kept the values the same, the technique worked, yet the piece did not look like a mirror image. The finished weaving now hangs in her dining room.

In addition to taking formal classes, Harris has also spent time drawing at the Saturday afternoon seminars at the University of Saskatchewan drawing studio. Other artists' drawings usually focus on the models. Harris's drawings occasionally show a shoulder or neck, but mostly they show in great detail the pattern of the ethnic costumes sometimes worn by the models, or the folds, highlights, and shadows of the background fabric. Some of these drawings are displayed on a wall in her drawing studio. Will they ever become weavings? Who knows? Why does she draw them? Because she believes that skilled drawing provides the foundation of good design. Once Harris has an idea, she will spend



weeks trying to produce an accurate drawing of what she has seen or wishes to portray. "I must come up with a drawing I am pleased with, on a subject with which I am emotionally involved," she says firmly. "Otherwise, I cannot hope to achieve a successful tapestry." In the process of designing a piece, Harris relies on various sources of inspiration. Whether she is at home or travelling, Harris always pays close attention to her environment. Sometimes her observations are recorded as drawings and sometimes as photographs, which she groups together in albums. Since much of her work realistically or abstractly shows nature, Harris spends a great deal of time out of doors.

Many of the places Harris visits in order to spark new ideas will be familiar to Saskatoon and area residents. She regularly walks along the Meewasin Valley Authority trails along the South Saskatchewan River. Sutherland Beach, an area on the east side of the river dotted with tangled brush, is a newly-found visual source for her. Harris's photographs of Cranberry Flats, south of Saskatoon, show coarse, grey juniper roots, like long cigar ashes, crossing above the walking paths, forking, sagging, and casting shadows. Other pictures show swaths of matted grass left after the winter snow has melted, serpentine tillage marks that reveal the undulations of the prairie, fields of wild grass, and salt flakes sloughed off a dry lake bed.

Urban space, too, provides striking images for Harris's collection. A neighbour's garage roof that is losing its top layer of hexagonal shingles (similar to the salt flakes) reveals a layer of rectangular shapes underneath. So

far, these visual fragments are still waiting for the next step in the process. Why does Harris collect images? "I am interested in all sorts of things," she says. "Colour, texture, pattern."

Once an inspiring image has crystallized in a drawn design, Harris doesn't go to the full-sized loom immediately. Instead, she asks herself if the technique she was planning to use is suitable for the design she has drawn. She says that there is no point in taking the time to warp a loom and use up expensive material if the design doesn't work. Doing a sample piece tells her what, if anything, needs to be changed before she begins.

Through trial and error, Harris has developed a number of practical ways of keeping on track during the weaving stage of a project. In order to save time, she often uses the finished drawing for a piece as a colour reference and tries to make the pencil marks of her drawing look like the threads she will be using. Because much of the weaving on a floor loom is hidden, however, Harris must also produce a full-sized cartoon for many large-scale pieces so that each shape stays in place and the scale remains correct. Using a black felt pen, Harris draws her cartoons on densely-woven, white outerwear fabric, intended for ski-jackets. She uses the outerwear fabric because it is wide enough to fit across her loom, keeps its shape under stress, and is strong enough not to rip when it is pinned to the weaving and rolled onto the take-up cloth.

Working on a floor loom makes it especially difficult for a weaver to monitor the progress of a piece, which gradually becomes hidden on the take-up cloth. Harris uses hundreds of different colours and textures of

RIGHT *Down Wings* (1990), tapestry with inlaid design, cotton, wool, silk, 148 centimetres in height, 168.5 centimetres in width, by Kaija Sanelma Harris. Collection of the College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan.

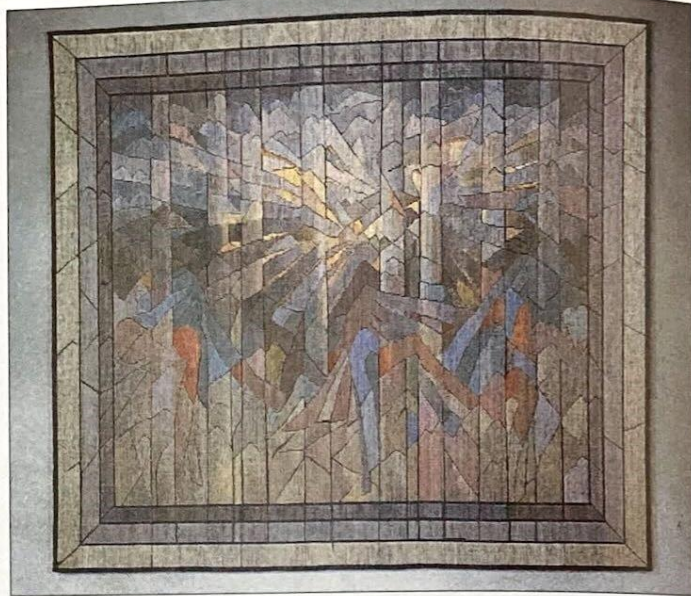
thread in her tapestries, and as the threads are laid side by side, their colour and value can change. In addition, she has found that mood and stress can subconsciously affect the colours she chooses. To record her progress and ensure colour consistency over time, Harris periodically unrolls her work and takes a Polaroid of it to check that her colour values remain true to her original design.

Harris chooses each thread like a draftsman chooses a pencil or a painter a brush: a thread makes a certain mark when it is under tension on the loom; off the loom the mark changes. "Every little thing about thread counts," says Harris, "the fibre content, how tight the twist, the weight, how it wears, the look and feel of it."

Harris likes to have colour variety in her work. For tapestries, she mixes weft yarns of similar weight to create unusual shades. Putting a shiny silk thread next to a dull wool one changes the value, tone, and colour of each. For afghans or throws, Harris strives to produce layers of colours. The warp is often composed of stripes of one group of colours, though she may sometimes mix contrasting colours together if the threads are fine. The weft, alternating wool and mohair, may be two different colours, analogous or complementary. One of Harris's afghans, for example, shows flecks of rust, orange, bright blue, light purple, and chartreuse under a layer of mauve mohair.

Harris's double-cloth fabrics, like the afghans, are designed to work on many levels. Each piece has two "good" sides, both interesting. The internal shapes and colours change if the fabrics are viewed with the light source coming from behind the piece or from in front of it. They also look different in daylight than they do in artificial light.

Harris developed the double-cloth structure in the course of researching a proposal for a series of hangings for the atrium of the Agriculture Building at University of Saskatchewan. Although she did not obtain the commission, Harris notes that the process of working up a proposal that will meet the requirements of a potential client often helps to expand her outlook and refocus or redirect her creativity. For the atrium proposal, Harris had to consider who would be using the space, the style of the architecture, the time of day when the hangings would be viewed, the available light, and so on. The finished project would have consisted of two con-



trasting "pyramids" of rectangular panels, with the one group of panels woven in shades of green to represent spring and the other in shades of rust and gold to represent autumn, hanging opposite one another in the north and south parts of the atrium respectively.

Harris wanted the panels to be light-weight in order to take advantage of the air movement produced by the ventilation system and the activities of the people in the atrium. The double cloth is a gauzy weave that consists of a series of square pockets. Each pocket contains a square of hand-painted cloth, part of a full-size painting done in acrylic washes and cut up. Some of the pockets contain squares of coloured photographic gels. The lacy weave allows the light to pass through the gels, which shimmer if the light is at the right angle.

Since completing the atrium proposal, Harris has woven a number of pieces using the double-cloth structure, including *Crosswinds I* [see back cover]. "The design for *Crosswinds I*," notes Harris, "was based on drawings of banners hung on a line [see page 7], clouds in the sky, and phenomena connected with air and sky." The piece received a Merit Award in "Dimensions '92."

Even when a weaving is taken off the loom, the design process is not finished. How a tapestry is hung may be crucial to its success. Afghans need to be finished with a fringe, and certain types of fringes complement certain weaves. Washing, drying, and total or partial rushing have to be planned. Such decisions need to be made before the

warp goes on the loom.

Harris's large-scale tapestries require the most steps to finish. The upper layer of the double-woven tapestries will be creased and the raised areas crushed. Harris nails boards to her attic floor and, using velcro, stretches the weaving. The raised tubes used in some pieces are stuffed with dowels, and the whole piece is covered with damp towels and left to dry for at least three days. Harris says that it is interesting to see how the piece tightens and straightens itself and to watch the raised areas puff up like they were meant to do.

When asked about her work and career plans, Harris says, "There is no one way of doing anything. I am in competition with myself to make the new work more interesting, not only for the viewer, but also for me. I am trying new processes, new themes, and therefore a constant theme is change."

What can an emerging craftsman learn from Kaija Sanelma Harris's approach? Be interested in everything. Care passionately about what you do. Take the time to draw, draw, draw. Plan all aspects of each piece. Learn the technique of your craft so that you can concentrate on content while you are working. Try new things. Be willing to change your mind if something does not work. And show only your best work. □

Dorothy Boran is a language and art teacher and a spinner and knitter from Saskatoon. Kaija Sanelma Harris will have an exhibition of woven quilts in the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon, March 10 to April 25, 1994.

Stefan Horpynka: Master Willow Weaver

BY KRISTINA KOMENDANT

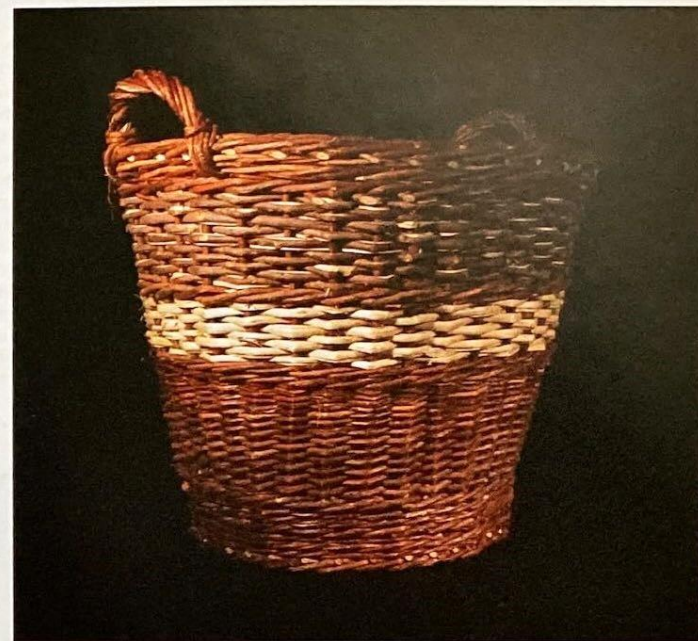
When I walked down the basement stairs, I was greeted by a wall of willow. Large and small bundles of white and brown willow were neatly tied together and leaning against the back wall. To the right was a worktable with various handmade tools on it. To the left, a dozen baskets sat neatly on a shelf. All of the baskets were the same size, all the same style. Below these were larger baskets, a picnic basket, a plant stand, a table, and a chair. I then realized why I had come to North Battleford to visit Stefan Horpynka. Many people had told me, "You just have to see Stefan's woven willow baskets and furniture; they're incredible!" They were absolutely right. The baskets and furniture pieces were incredible, and I had never seen anything like them before.

Stefan Horpynka began his education in willow weaving as a boy of nine in Sokal', Ukraine, where he learned how to make baskets from his father, who made them as a hobby. Mr. Horpynka's father taught him how to make two styles of baskets and, from that disciplined training, to go beyond to create furniture. Mr. Horpynka recalls that it was difficult, as a boy of nine, to sit and learn the intricacies of basket making. He would rather have played with his friends, but he had no choice in the matter. He admits, however, that the training did prove useful during World War II and afterwards, whenever he needed extra income.

Sponsored by an uncle, Mr. Horpynka immigrated to Canada in 1948, after the war, and, like many others, came with very little to start a new life. He worked for the CNR, acquired his fifth-class boiler papers, and then obtained a job in the maintenance department of the hospital in North Battleford. Mr. Horpynka's welding skills, acquired from working in various blacksmith shops as a young man, have enabled him to make many of the tools and pieces of equipment he needs for his willow weaving. He is retired now and pursues willow weaving only when he is inspired to do so.

One feature that sets Mr. Horpynka's style of furniture and basketry apart is his use of two colours of willow combined in intricate patterns. One type of willow, which is collected in the spring and immediately stripped of its bark, is white, while the other, which is collected in the fall, boiled in a drum for three to four hours, and then left to soak, is dyed a deep, rich brown by the pigment the boiling process releases from the bark. Another distinguishing feature of Mr. Horpynka's work is the use of split willow. Mr. Horpynka uses the willow strips for baskets, table tops, and chair seats, as well as the wrappings around the legs and joints. The combination of light and dark willow is typical of traditional European basket-making.

Mr. Horpynka's furniture style is reminiscent of wicker furniture styles of the 1920s in the United States, particularly the "Bar Harbour" style, named after a popular resort town in Maine. Mr. Horpynka, who does not concern himself about terminology or technical information—"I am not a scientist"—simply calls his furniture "Brand New Antique" wicker. In the Victorian era and the early 1900s, tightly-woven, intricate designs and scroll work were the



ABOVE Woven willow basket, by Stefan Horpynka.

norm for wicker furniture. The Bar Harbour style, which featured clean, simple lines and open lattice work, was specifically designed to reduce the high labour costs associated with wicker furniture. Open lattice work can be seen in Mr. Horpynka's chair backs and cribs. Mr. Horpynka's furniture also echoes the Bar Harbour style in the way the table and chair legs are joined, in the style of the wrappings around the legs, and in the ornamentation called "pine-apple feet" at the bottom of the legs.

Mr. Horpynka's baskets and furniture are made from "100% Saskatchewan-made willow," which lends itself extremely well to weaving and wrapping. There are many species of willow in Saskatchewan, with sandbar willow, yellow willow, and basket willow being the most common along rivers. Collecting the willow

STEFAN HORPYNKA: MASTER WILLOW WEAVER



is one of the most important tasks in willow weaving and one aspect Mr. Horpynka especially enjoys. Walking along the North Saskatchewan River collecting willow allows Mr. Horpynka to be close to nature. He feels peaceful and calm among the birds and animals there. He has his special places where he collects his willow just outside the city of North Battleford and keeps his drum for boiling willow in the fall in a permanent location there.

In the spring, Mr. Horpynka mainly collects willow that is one year old. He looks for single, unbranching shoots. These can reach lengths of five to six feet. Mr. Horpynka uses the one-year-old shoots, which he calls "Number One Exclusive," for everything. He likes to strip the shoots right along the river where he has collected them. He uses a handmade, v-shaped iron that strips the bark off evenly and cleanly. With half of the work thus completed, he can then bundle the willow and carry it home.

Mr. Horpynka collects willow according to his needs and the purpose the material will serve. The diameter of the shoots ranges from about 2 millimetres to 3.8 centimetres. To test the flexibility of the smaller shoots, Mr. Horpynka wraps them around his finger. "They are all special," he says. "I take only what I need. The beaver take everything." For the larger willow sizes, he travels up to the Meadow Lake area where there are fewer beaver competing with him for the same material.

When asked about the process of boiling the willow in order to stain it, Mr. Horpynka notes that folk artists in Ukraine have long used the technique of boiling woody materials to obtain the dyes used to stain eggs for special occasions. On a more humorous note, he says that once he was so engrossed in the boiling procedure that he was unaware that a group of people had gathered close to him.

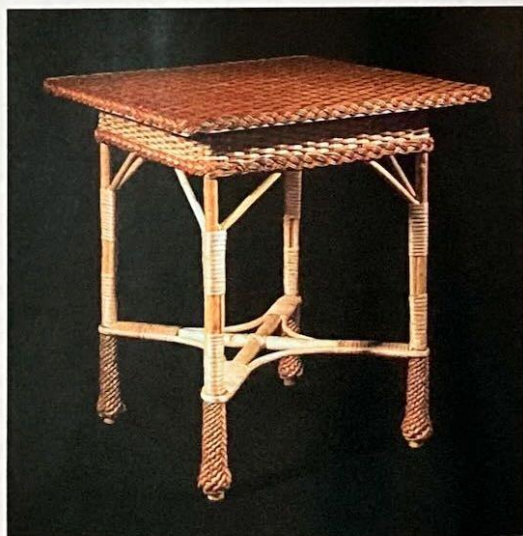
When he finally noticed them, they asked if he had seen the moose that had wandered close by his camp. He had not.

One tool that Mr. Horpynka considers indispensable is his splitter. Fashioned from an old broom handle, the splitter, which looks like a y-shaped Phillips screwdriver, neatly divides the willow into three pieces in one pass. Once the willow is split, Mr. Horpynka runs the pieces through his handmade planer so that they are even, smooth, "all perfect." The stripping tool, splitter, and planer all contribute to Mr. Horpynka's unique style. Although he does own an electric drill, he seldom uses it, preferring instead to work entirely by hand.

Stefan Horpynka is now 75 years old and wants to pass his knowledge on to others. "If I know something," he says, "I want others to know too." Although he has met with many younger people who seemed anxious to learn his technique, he says that they invariably become discouraged when they realize the commitment required and do not return after the first lesson. Recalling one incident, Mr. Horpynka says that six students once arranged to come to his home to learn willow weaving, and he had all of the material and extras ready, but no one showed up. In total, about thirty-five people have come to visit Mr. Horpynka and learn his method of willow weaving, but until recently, he knew of no one who was seriously pursuing it. "It is not possible to learn all in just one visit," he says.

Two students who are committed to willow weaving and want to apprentice to a master willow weaver like Stefan Horpynka are Rosa Gebhardt of Humboldt and Elizabeth Cline, who recently moved to North Battleford.

Rosa Gebhardt first became interested in willow weaving in 1992, while she was the artist-in-residence in the Humboldt area, working on a project to promote and develop German Folk Art. Gebhardt has been involved in many crafts, including reed basket making, but decided to learn more about willow weaving after seeing the work of a man who had travelled to Humboldt to sell willow baskets. She began to make inquiries into where and from whom she could learn how to make willow baskets. Gebhardt was particularly interested in learning how to weave willow in the European style as opposed to the First Nations style. Eventually, she heard about Stefan Horpynka. She didn't realize it at the time, but she had picked up Mr. Horpynka's card at a craft fair at the Western Development Museum years earlier, and she still had it. Gebhardt contacted Mr.



STEFAN HORPYNKA: MASTER WILLOW WEAVER



ABOVE, RIGHT, AND OPPOSITE BOTTOM Woven willow basket and furniture by Stefan Horpynka. Photos: Laura J. Headley. OPPOSITE TOP Stefan Horpynka in his basement workshop. Photo: Rosa Gebhardt. Printed by Grant Kernan, AK Photos.

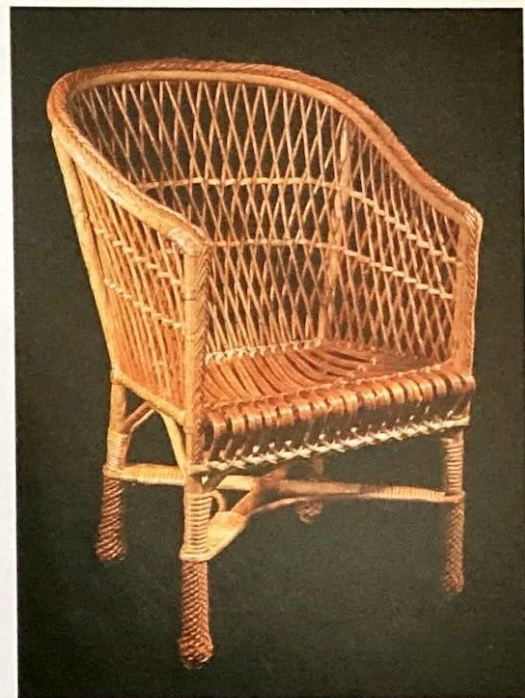
Horpynka and a two-day lesson and video-taping by her husband got under way.

Gebhardt says that she found it a humbling experience to learn from a man who could weave so instinctively and perfectly, adding that she wishes she could have spent more time studying with him. "Stefan's weaving," she says admiringly, "is so perfect and consistent. Willow is harder to work with than reed. It is physically challenging for your shoulders, arms, and fingers. Strength is needed." Watching Mr. Horpynka do the braiding patterns, Gebhardt was amazed at how quickly and naturally he worked. "Stefan teaches traditional basket design, and carries with him a unique style along with the two-toned willow," says Gebhardt. "It is important that we keep this tradition alive."

Elizabeth Cline is another loyal student of Mr. Horpynka who has caught the willow-weaving bug. One of the main reasons for Cline's recent relocation to North Battleford was to learn more from her teacher. Like Gebhardt, Cline initially heard of Mr. Horpynka by word of mouth. Although Cline had taken a class on bent-willow chair construction at Emma Lake, she had previously been making baskets. She now wants to perfect her basket making and then progress to woven furniture pieces. As a direct result of Mr. Horpynka's influence, some of Cline's bent-willow furniture pieces already incorporate willow weaving. Cline describes Mr. Horpynka as a master craftsman and wants to learn from him as apprentices did years ago. She notes, however, that she initially had to make a number of visits to Mr. Horpynka's home before he took her seriously. "Once Stefan senses your strong and genuine interest in willow weaving," says Cline, "he is more than willing to share his knowledge and expertise."

Gebhardt and Cline have learned how to make the traditional baskets that are the starting point for all of Mr. Horpynka's teaching. "As soon as you know small," says Mr. Horpynka, "you can go to something big." All of the techniques needed to construct furniture pieces are learned in making the baskets. Practice is a must, and when Mr. Horpynka sees that you have a grasp of the simpler skills, he progresses to the next step. "Patience and a lot of practice," he says confidently, "bring results."

Mr. Horpynka has demonstrated his craft for many years at the Western Development Museum in North Battleford. He has also been involved in a few small craft sales, but because willow weaving is very labour intensive, he cannot produce enough for the big two or three day sales. At one two-day craft fair he attended, Mr. Horpynka sold



all of his merchandise in half an hour. He now only makes baskets and furniture pieces when he feels like it and much prefers to sell them directly from his home. His wife Ann helps by scheduling appointments for him and handling the finances. He especially likes it when people take an interest in his work and go out of their way to find him. "If they want me," he says, "they will look for me."

Mr. Horpynka likes to see who is buying his willow weaving and does not like the idea of selling pieces in a store with a mark-up, a practice which he considers unfair to both craftspeople and buyers. He does not price his baskets and furniture according to the amount of labour involved, which would make them quite expensive, but instead charges what he thinks is reasonable. He is not concerned with making a huge profit on his work; he does willow weaving because he genuinely enjoys it. His enthusiasm can be felt immediately upon entering the basement where his willow bunches, work space, and showroom are all contained in one modest space. He will fill custom orders and make anything if requested. "You name it," he says, "I'll make it."

Although Mr. Horpynka's direct sales approach has tended to isolate him from the mainstream of Saskatchewan craft, he says that, as far as he knows, there is no one else in the country who is making his type of woven willow furniture. At 75 years of age, Mr. Horpynka is still an active craftsman, and his beautifully designed and finished baskets and furniture deserve to be more widely seen and appreciated. I came away with a better understanding of willow, baskets, and woven furniture, and certainly will think fondly of my visits to Stefan and Ann Horpynka's house each time I visit the Farmer's Market with my new basket or sit in one of Mr. Horpynka's chairs. □

Kristina Komendant is a Saskatoon-based calligrapher who specializes in poems and quotations, business cards and logo designs, and outdoor signs.

Interpreting Women's Textile Work

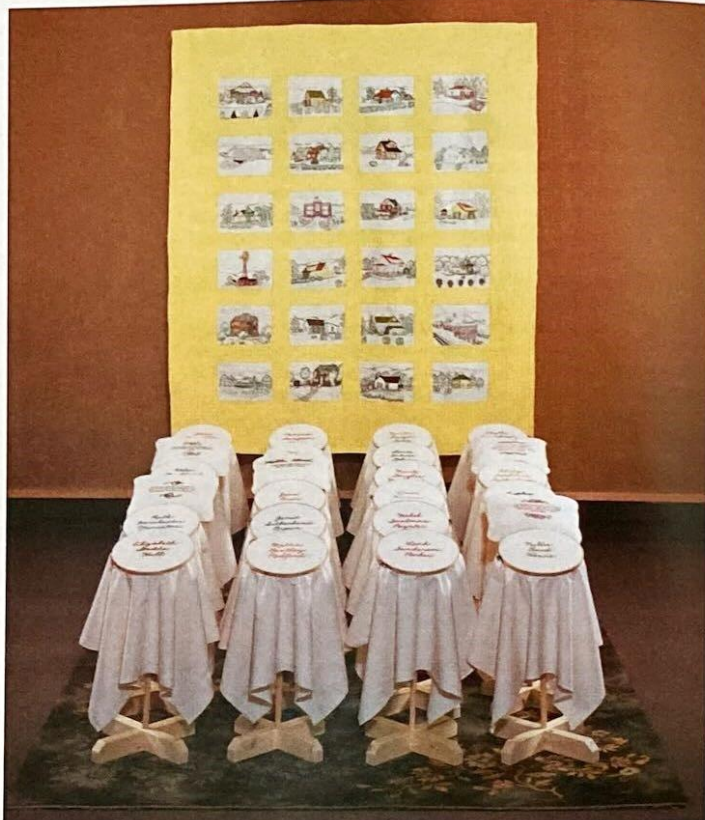
By GREG BEATTY

Among the most endearing bits of folklore associated with the settlement history of Saskatchewan is the practice of isolated pioneer women coming together to socialize in Homemakers Clubs. In *For Home and Country*, Regina artist Heather Cameron uses a pieced quilt produced by one such group of women, the Tantallon Homemakers Club, as the focal point of an installation intended to examine the extent to which women's cultural production has been marginalized in our society.

The town of Tantallon was founded in east-central Saskatchewan in 1903. It was named after Tantallon Castle in Scotland, the ancestral home of one of the town's founders. Twenty-three years later, in 1926, the Tantallon Homemakers Club was established. The Club, which was part of a provincial organization affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan, was dedicated to making farm life more pleasant and comfortable for women. In keeping with the provincial motto, "For Home and Country," each club was involved in fundraising for a variety of local projects—libraries, rest rooms, public health clinics—intended to enhance Saskatchewan's social infrastructure. But the goals of the women were not entirely altruistic. Through regular meetings in rural communities and annual conventions in Saskatoon, the club members also worked to improve the status of women throughout the province.

In 1938, the Tantallon Homemakers Club made a quilt as a parting gift for club member Patricia Kerr when she and her husband, the United Church minister, left Tantallon for another parish. The quilt depicted the homes of the nineteen club members, along with five public sites in Tantallon: the church, the school, the bridge, the pumphouse, and the railway station. In 1991, Mrs. Kerr's daughter donated the quilt to the Regina Public Library. In 1993, the Dunlop Art Gallery commissioned Heather Cameron to research the quilt's history and present her findings in the form of an exhibition.

"The exhibition came about by way of Heather sending us some slides of her work," says Dunlop Director/Curator Helen Marzolf. "She was interested in textiles, and had also done some collage work addressing



the problem of homelessness. When you think about what is happening in rural Saskatchewan today, there is an issue of displacement. Conceptually, it seemed like a logical match."

The Regina Public Library Permanent Collection has been in existence since the 1940s. Through individual donations and publicly-funded purchases of artwork, the Library has sought to document the evolution of art in Saskatchewan from its origins in folk art to the present. Marzolf, however, believes that the Permanent Collection must operate as more than just a record of Saskatchewan's cultural heritage. "Art has value in the economy of ideas," she insists. "The work in our collection exists in the public

ABOVE *For Home and Country* (1994), installation at the Dunlop Art Gallery, by Heather Cameron. Photo: Patricia Holdsworth.

OPPOSITE *For Home and Country* (1994), detail, by Heather Cameron. Photo: Heather Cameron.

trust. In contemporary society, it is the role of institutions like museums, art galleries, and libraries to make it possible for new interpretations of history to emerge."

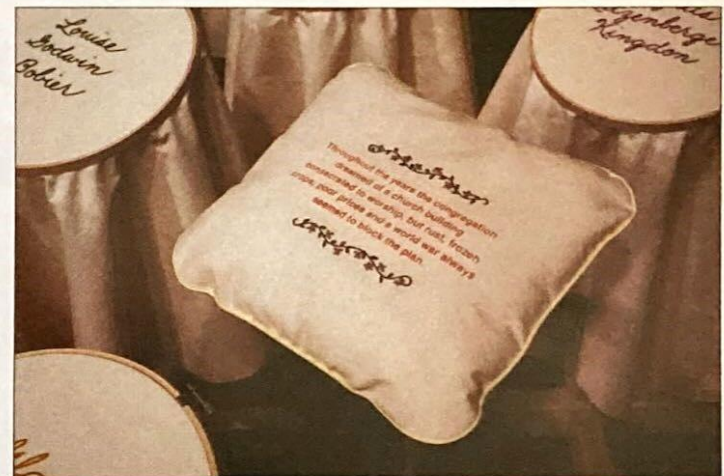
When an artist is inspired by the work of others, the influence usually manifests itself in subtle and diffuse ways. Cameron, in contrast, actually incorporates the Tantallon quilt into her installation. And it is arguable that, by allowing the artist to do so, the

Dunlop placed the quilt's artistic integrity in jeopardy. "It was a judgment call," Marzolf admits. "Some pieces are intended to be shown only by themselves. But the whole community was involved in the production of the Tantallon quilt. It was displayed along with other textiles in the Homemakers' exhibit at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto in 1939. The intention of the quilt's creators was clearly different than [the intention of] someone who focuses on private and personal matters."

When Cameron began her project, she had little information about the Tantallon quilt. "The Dunlop sent me a slim file of documentation," she recalls, "a few photographs, a newspaper article from the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* (dated May 27, 1954), and a handwritten list of the Homemakers' names. While researching the quilt, I had the opportunity to talk to many past and present residents of Tantallon. I was struck by their pride in their town, and how carefully they maintained their social and family relationships."

In response to the quilt, Cameron elected to embroider the first, maiden, and married name of each club member on a separate embroidery hoop. This required some detective work, as the list Cameron had received from the Dunlop only identified the women by their husbands' names. This social convention, in conjunction with the conservative mandate of the Homemakers Clubs, suggests that the identities of the women of Tantallon were largely subsumed in their roles as wives and mothers. It is no accident that the women chose to embroider images of their houses on the quilt. In the 1930s, the home truly was the focus of a woman's life, and its appearance, as far as a woman and her husband were able, would have been tailored to reflect her taste and personality.

By identifying the women who made the quilt, Cameron establishes authorship. In essence, through her handwritten script, executed in the finest style of schoolhouse penmanship, which in the 1930s was a hallmark of good character and breeding, she offers nineteen generic versions of the artist's signature, an important signifier of legitimacy in fine art. Historically, women's textile work has not been recognized as fine art but instead has often been dismissed as decorative art or "craft" by the male-dominated art establishment. In pure aesthetic terms, however, many have argued that the distinction between fine and decorative art has typically been based on little more than the gender of the maker. By choosing embroidery as her primary mode of artistic expression, Cameron underscores her belief that the Tantallon quiltmakers were indeed artists.



"They chose their best draftswomen to design the quilt," says Cameron, "and their finest embroiderers to bring it to life. The aesthetic value of the quilt was recognized not only by its makers but also by Mrs. Kerr, who kept it carefully stored in a trunk, thereby preserving it as a work of art." During the course of her research, Cameron discovered that preliminary sketches of each house and public building had been made on scraps of brown paper by Club members Leah Parker and Phyllis Kingdon. The sketches were then transferred to cloth using the pounce method where powdered chalk is sprinkled onto the cloth through small perforations in the paper. Because the Tantallon quilt was made during the depths of the Depression, the quilt's makers were especially frugal in their use of materials. The twenty-four quilt blocks, for example, were fashioned from sugar sacks. In embellishing the line drawings, however, the women seem to have allowed themselves some artistic license. Each quilt block contains many details—delicately embroidered bay, piano, and dormer windows, trellised gateways, bird baths—which provide a fascinating insight into Prairie architecture in the 1930s. But the immaculate condition of the buildings, and the lushness of the flowers and garden greenery in the midst of what historians describe as a devastating decade of drought, suggests that the idyllic vision of rural life depicted in the quilt is, in part, a fictional construct.

Although Cameron originally considered including photographs of Tantallon in her installation, she eventually decided against the idea because she did not want to overshadow the quilt. Instead, she wanted the quilt to be the focus of the exhibition. But the decision to respond to the quilt through

embroidery alone is not unproblematic. Within the context of feminist art criticism, a number of critics have argued that certain forms of textile practice, such as samplers, once contributed to the oppression of women by inculcating in them the questionable domestic virtues of passivity, patience, and obedience. Cameron's installation may unintentionally validate these virtues.

Of course, as Roszika Parker points out in *The Subversive Stitch*, women's textile work may also function as a weapon of resistance to the rigid constraints of patriarchy. Far from rejecting embroidery as a manifestation of feminine weakness, many female artists have embraced the medium as a positive expression of femininity that enables women to subvert the dominant forms of encoding cultural information. In this regard, the Dunlop Art Gallery has actively promoted textile art by women. In recent years, the Dunlop has presented exhibitions of colourful arpilleras from Chile, cross-stitched samplers by Leslie Sampson, Gobelin-style tapestries by Ann Newdigate, and quilts by Barbara Todd.

"To me, a quilt has as much validity as a painting, sculpture, photography, or pot," says Marzolf. "The Tantallon quilt possesses many of the attributes we routinely ascribe to art—colour, texture, form. The women did not work from a pattern. They created an original design, something specific to their community."

By presenting nineteen separate embroidery hoops, each corresponding to a block on the quilt, Cameron metaphorically "deconstructs" one product of women's cooperative labour. In the process, she provides us with an insight into the painstaking nature of quilt-making. Needlework, which



LEFT *For Home and Country* (1994), detail, installation at the Dunlop Art Gallery in Regina, by Heather Cameron. Photo: Heather Cameron.

exists of similar misconduct here, the fact that seventeen of the nineteen club members, in a district which had significant East European and Scandinavian immigration, possessed Anglo-Saxon names, and that each woman's house was stitched to scale on the quilt, does suggest that the Homemakers Club operated as an unofficial social registry in Tantallon.

As a final comment on *For Home and Country*, it is indeed unfortunate that security concerns in the unsupervised gallery necessitated the erection of a protective barrier around the installation. Although the barrier reinforces the quilt's status as a precious art object, it not only makes it more difficult to appreciate the artistry of the women's skilful stitching technique but also negates the makers' intention that the quilt should be touched and held. As well, the placement of the hoops and pillows is somewhat awkward. Each is intended to have a direct relationship with a particular quilt block, but because the hoops and pillows are wider than the quilt blocks, they look as though they are jostling for position, rather like unruly school children who are attempting to align themselves according to the directions of their teacher.

Aside from their material value to Saskatchewan pioneers, quilts are rife with socio-cultural connotations. On one level, quilts functioned as an intimate symbol of love, warmth, and security. On another level, with their intertwining threads and piece-work construction, they served as a metaphor for the integration that occurred as different immigrant communities settled the province. The enthusiastic public response Cameron's installation received at its opening makes it clear that women's textile work still has the power to move people. "The level of interest among people with a personal connection to Tantallon was very high," Marzolf reports. "It was very refreshing to go to an opening where people were totally focused on the art." At present, plans call for the quilt to be displayed at Tantallon's 80th annual agricultural fair this summer, and there is even talk of local women producing a second quilt depicting the twenty-four houses and public buildings as they exist today. If the measure of an artwork's power lies in its ability to span generations, there can be no doubt that the Tantallon quilt is an unqualified success. □

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was usually done in the evening, after more pressing tasks were completed, did strain women's eyes. And the repetitive motion of pushing a needle and thread through cloth often produced nerve and muscle damage in women's forearms. But at the same time, Cameron's embroidery hoops are themselves unsigned. Thus, the issue of authorship remains unresolved in Cameron's own work.

In response to the five quilt blocks featuring public sites in Tantallon, Cameron created five pillows embroidered with printed excerpts from the 1973 community history, *Tales of Tantallon*. On the one hand, Cameron's use of a pillow motif symbolically integrates the public and private lives of the pioneer women. The community history, on the other hand, functions as a non-authoritative, anecdotal form of history that privileges the voices of everyday people. On the pillow corresponding to the quilt block of the United Church, for example, Cameron has embroidered the following recollection of one unnamed Tantallon resident: "Throughout the years the congregation dreamed of a church building consecrated to worship, but rust, frozen crops, poor prices, and a world war always seemed to block the plan."

From pioneer times onward, residents of the Prairies recognized that men and women had to work together if problems of economic shortages and isolation were to be overcome. In the case of the Tantallon church, one person donated a site. The former Tantallon school was purchased for \$250. Volunteer labour built a foundation, moved the school onto the site, and did the renovations needed to convert the building into a church. Pews, pulpit, and communion table were all donated. One of the principal fundraising projects was an "autograph" quilt undertaken by the

Ladies' Aid, which charged local residents ten cents each to have their names embroidered on a quilt block. The first service in the new church was held in December 1929.

In order to reinforce the notion that the Tantallon quilt is art, Cameron elected to display it on the wall as one would a painting. Although the tightly-packed embroidery hoops and pillows mounted on thigh-level wood embroidery hoops standing on the carpet in front of the quilt do suggest the form of a bed, the general installation strategy seems to be standard practice whenever antique quilts are exhibited in an art gallery. But by privileging the Tantallon quilt's aesthetic qualities, and downplaying its ability to function as a utilitarian object, it may be that Cameron has partially negated the original intention of the quilt's makers. With the dramatic lighting, the net effect is to create a poignant memorial to the pioneer women who helped settle this often harsh and unforgiving land.

Indeed, Cameron may have treated her subject too reverently. Had she been able to distance herself more from the personal nature of her project, she may have been able to provide a more critical analysis of the quilt's significance to Saskatchewan history. One possible avenue of inquiry relates to the elitist character of the Homemakers Clubs. By their very nature, the Clubs would have been open only to those women who enjoyed the luxury of leisure time. In his 1920 novel *Main Street*, Sinclair Lewis mercilessly satirizes a similar organization, "The Jolly Seventeen," located in the fictional Minnesota town of Gopher Prairie, for its narrow-minded provincialism and condescending attitude toward the town's German and Scandinavian residents. Although little evidence

The Ecology of Contemporary Furniture Making

By DOUG HASLAM

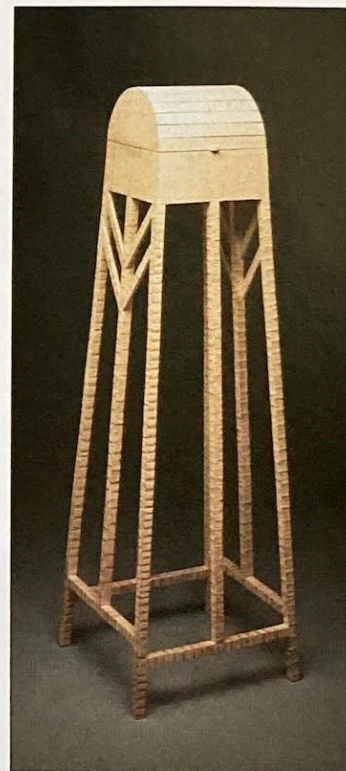
The phenomenon of designer-made studio furniture in North America has increased dramatically in the past twenty years. Whether designer-makers have come to the craft out of creative discontent with available furniture, in the search for a creative outlet, or as an extension of work grounded in other disciplines, their numbers have steadily increased and their work is gaining a higher profile in the worlds of art and design.

As furniture makes the transition from the bench upon which we sit while viewing art to being the art itself, the complexity of the production process is demanding ever more of furniture makers. In addition to being a designer, technician, and engineer, the maker is now also expected to fulfil the roles of consultant, teacher, business person, ecologist, and so on.

Traditionally the realm of the woodworker, furniture-making now embraces an astonishing variety of disciplines. While many furniture-makers still prefer to use wood as their primary material, most have at least experimented with combining wood with other craft materials such as metal, glass, ceramic, and fibre, while others like Brian Gladwell of Regina have abandoned wood altogether for certain applications.

Much contemporary furniture takes advantage of modern materials and technical innovations, making use of bright colour in the form of paint, high-tech finishes, and plastic laminates, and incorporating unusual textures, patterns, and other decorative elements. One maker, Thomas Huxley of New York State, is even investigating the use of fragrance in his work. Although experiments in the sensual experience of furniture can be carried to extremes—one might not look forward to the experience of sucking on a drawer pull to test its flavour—few would deny that the dynamic exploration and healthy cross-pollination of the crafts has also resulted in the production of an unprecedented variety of new and exciting designs.

"Furniture" as a discipline may not define the limits of the materials to be used, but it does imply a reasonable degree of functionality. As an anchor point in the design process, functionality can be worked from or worked towards. Furniture-makers may be-



ABOVE *Cabinet* (1991), wood, by Michael Hurwitz. Photo courtesy of the artist.

gin with the idea of creating a table, or they may experiment with a number of purely sculptural ideas and, through a process of transformation, arrive at a solution that fulfils the requirements of a table.

The work of many designer-makers reveals a deep understanding of the symbolic importance of furniture in our culture. Contoured by the human need to communicate, the objects we live with continually influ-

ence us on subtle sensory and psychological levels that are nonetheless quite powerful. A chair, as armature to the human form, can stand in for the body's presence or act as a "seat of power." The table is a meeting place, a battleground for conflict and resolution, a stage for the domestic theatre of mealtime.

At times working in opposition to the main current of North American industrial design, the designer-makers enjoy the freedom to develop and prototype ideas without bureaucratic intervention. The designer-maker's sensitivity to materials and techniques allows a wider variety of designs to evolve beyond the drafting table (if one is even used), and the design process continues on into construction of the work, resulting in various subtle or dramatic transformations of the original concept. Unlike industrial designers, who are constrained by the short product life cycles needed to maintain the commercial viability of large firms, independent designer-makers are generally concerned about creating work that is both physically and aesthetically enduring, an approach that has the undoubted advantage of being consonant with contemporary ecological concerns.

Identifying trends or styles in contemporary designer-made furniture is difficult. Approaches are as diverse as the people who practise the craft. Although regional styles of furniture such as traditional Québécois or Santa Fe do exist, those styles are just as likely to be made anywhere on the continent and to have undergone some form of personal interpretation.

Most furniture makers fall somewhere between the extremes of the ardent traditionalist and the designer on the cutting edge. While some prefer to work within clearly delineated boundaries, others seize as much freedom as they can obtain. The constraints of the commissioning process can be excessively restrictive for one designer and liberating for another. There are makers who only produce one-of-a-kind pieces and others who enjoy doing multiples and production runs. The designing and building process may vary from an analytical, step-by-step procedure to an all-out creative frenzy.

What distinguishes each general approach identified below is not so much the style of

the finished work as the particular style of working. And what brings the many different styles of working together is their common goal: the production of furniture.

THE EVOLUTION OF FORM: Camille Mouillot, John Morel, Don Kondra

Camille Mouillot is a furniture-maker with his feet firmly set in tradition. Originally from France, Mouillot enrolled in l'École Boule in Paris at the age of fourteen and spent five years there learning the art of the *ébéniste*. Since 1970, he has operated a shop in Montréal where he works solid wood in the purest tradition of the European artisan, without compromise in matters of materials or craftsmanship. Each piece, though inspired by French furniture of the past five centuries, is individually designed for the client and painstakingly drawn and laid out. None of Mouillot's pieces is produced in series.

Producing everything from armoires to architectural fittings for historical buildings, Mouillot typically makes good use of moulding details and fielded carvings of representational and stylized natural forms. These decorative elements are never just for show but instead are always integrated into an overall design, lending a dignified elegance to the work. It is in the carefully-chosen details and carving that Mouillot's work transcends the form and reaches the level of high art while avoiding the pretentiousness and artifice that mars some contemporary work.

Another furniture maker to have come from a traditional background is Alberta's John Morel. Brought up in the English Arts and Crafts/Cotswold tradition that included such personages as Gimson, the Barnsleys, and Voysey, Morel has also been inspired by the works of Carl Malmsten, Corbusier, and Gaudi. He has been in the crafts all his life, having learned woodworking at the elbow of his father Oliver and then apprenticed as a blacksmith at a young age. Morel returned to wood and the making of furniture in 1976.

Rather than working within a particular style, Morel prefers to work towards one of his own, seeking original expression while remaining true to his craft. He makes detailed sketches of each piece, often drawing a full-size version on sheets of plywood to resolve proportions, weight, and joinery details. He prefers to work with wood because of its natural characteristics such as colour, grain, and figure, and construction proceeds in an organized, methodical fashion.

Inspiration for Morel's work frequently comes from nature, but whether Morel is drawing on the space and scale of the mountains or the interpreting the reflection and



refraction of light, his furniture always remains uniquely his own.

With fifteen years as a furniture designer and maker behind him, Don Kondra of Saskatoon finds that his work, while still centred on function, seems to have a more artistic lean to it lately. Being self-taught, he feels that he is not restricted by preconceived notions of how things should be built or how they should look.

Although Kondra produces the occasional show piece, he concentrates mainly on commissions. His design process usually begins with a particular type of furniture and involves meeting the functional needs of the piece in an interesting and beautiful way. "I design for function," notes Kondra. "I move from a sketch to a full-sized drawing, from one-quarter scale mock up to actual piece."

Inspired by the simple lines of Japanese and ancient Egyptian work, Kondra has recently been moving away from traditional, all-wood pieces, producing work that combines wood with medium-density fibreboard, vacuum veneering, coloured lacquer, and metal. Kondra's design for a side table, for instance, was produced in two versions. While the one version used traditional materials and finishes, the other was made of fibreboard and Saskatchewan birch and finished with red, turquoise, and white lacquer, the blending of smooth, bright colours with relatively simple forms giving the piece a clean, sculptural look that is perhaps more modernist than postmodernist.

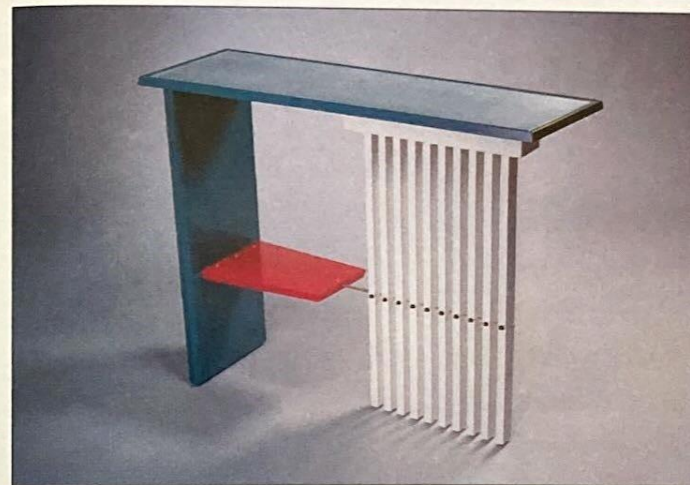
Although Kondra has found that many local buyers have reservations about purchasing brightly-coloured, non-traditional furniture, he adds that he is willing to spend a great deal of time on pieces that are personally satisfying and that he always tries to educate his clients in an effort to expand their taste.

CULTIVATING A HYBRID AESTHETIC: Michael Hurwitz, Joel Robson

Originally drawn to woodworking by an interest in making musical instruments, Michael Hurwitz of Pennsylvania has been designing and making furniture for fifteen years now. Perhaps best known for his use of bent lamination to produce curvilinear forms, Hurwitz explains that it is the design and not the technique that comes first and that lamination has simply been the best way of using wood to make what he has drawn.

Hurwitz is currently working with a number of non-traditional materials, including marble mosaics that are applied to horizontal surfaces. He says that he will soon be building a desk featuring a plastered surface with a woven straw substrate that will show through in places. The inspiration for the design came from the mud and straw walls of the Japanese tea houses Hurwitz had seen during a six month stay in Kyoto, where he worked with a traditional tea-tray carver.

A chaise lounge on rockers made by Hurwitz a few years back provides an excel-



lent example of his synthesis of design and technique. Now in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian, the chaise consists of a continuously curved back, seat, and leg rest made up of numerous bent-laminated strips with the two outside strips looping back under to form part of the support structure. The chaise is physically and visually tied together by two curved rockers that enable the user to sway gently while relaxing. Graceful and elegant, the chaise lounge stands as a precise embodiment of Hurwitz's rigorous personal standards of design and craftsmanship.

On a slightly more sombre, provocative note, Hurwitz's recent design for a narrow wooden table with a leather top looks rather like a hospital stretcher on a frame. This resemblance is especially strong in the version of the table where the wood has been finished with a thin layer of paint that produces an suitably worn, white-washed look.

Toronto furniture-maker Joel Robson believes that designer-makers should ideally work to attain a certain depth and breadth of experience. Like a composer familiar with many musical forms, a designer who has explored diverse techniques and styles will ultimately be more versatile and able to address contemporary issues from an educated perspective.

A graduate of the Furniture Design course at Sheridan College in Ontario, Robson describes his own work in terms of the accumulation of sculp-

tural ideas. Working with planar contrasts and choices in proportion, he concentrates on producing unified compositions. Although Robson continues to incorporate texture and surface marks in his work, he now uses them in a more subtle and understated way than he did in the past. Also prominent in Robson's work is the use of metal and wood inlay and subtle alterations of the figure with pigments.

Doing mainly commission work, Robson has little time or money to devote to speculative pieces at present, though he considers experimentation to be important to an artist's development. Robson enjoys the dialogue of the commission process and finds that a client's requirements will often push



LEFT Side Table (1993), medium-density fibreboard (MDF), birch, brass, lacquer, 81 centimetres in height, 101.5 centimetres in length, by Don Kondra.

BOTTOM Table (1993), wood, paint, 176 centimetres in length, by Michael Hurwitz. Photo courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE Dressing Table (1991), cherry, madrone, holly, with mirror, by John Morel. Photo courtesy of the artist.

him into design territory he might not have otherwise explored. He finds that his clients, mainly artists and design professionals, are seeking quieter, more restrained designs, a trend which he says happily coincides with his present personal direction.

Still, the diversity in Robson's approach is evident. In a recently exhibited compact-disk rack, Robson dyed the wood black and gouged a criss-cross pattern into the surface with a fork in order to reveal the lighter material below. In contrast, an upcoming commission for an architect is a table and buffet in maple with aluminum inlay and accents with a subtle inlay of dark wood.

RECOMBINANT FURNITURE: Garry Knox Bennett, Ron David, Doug Taylor

A quirky sense of humour is the hallmark of Garry Knox Bennett's furniture. Originally schooled in painting and sculpture, Bennett creates strongly sculptural pieces characterized by the use of intense, dramatic colours, contrasting finishes, and highly expressive textures and patterns. In an intuitive design process, Bennett works directly with the wood and is adept at creating interesting

variations on selected themes. He enjoys taking shots at the purist tradition of wood-working by such acts as hammering a nail into the pristine surface of an otherwise perfectly finished cabinet.

Irreverence aside, Bennett consistently produces work of high-quality craftsmanship that reveals his artistic background. The Hobnail desk included in the American Craft Museum's 1991 exhibition, "Explorations II: The New Furniture," is characteristic of Bennett's work. The surface of the square walnut slab top of the desk has been cut away in a symmetrical fashion and the cut edges painted yellow to emphasize the remaining shapes and to contain the natural walnut grain of the horizontal surfaces. Checks and irregularities have been filled with yellow epoxy to bring them to the viewer's attention. The base consists of four massive legs made up of two end-to-end truncated cones resting on large white cubes that have textured, pyramidal faces reminiscent of meat tenderizers. The cubes appear somewhat threatening but would perhaps be ironically appropriate if the desk were placed in a confrontational corporate setting. The desk's single, centrally-placed drawer is faced with the checkerboard pattern so often seen in Bennett's work, while the handle echoes the geometric shapes of the top.

A two-sided "partners" desk made by Bennett at about the same time as the *Hobnail Desk* uses some of the same elements but in a different configuration. The walnut-slab top of the partner's desk features a smooth central work surface divided into two and flanked on both sides by jagged-edged, raised sections that retain the marks left by the milling process. The textured cubes appear again, but here they sit atop large block legs that have been coloured with acrylic paint and gesso and sanded back through.

Garry Knox Bennett's tongue-in-cheek approach is refreshing and hopefully shakes up the technically-obsessed furniture maker in the same proportion as it delights the trend-conscious art critic.

Ron David of Sidney, B.C., has been working in furniture of one form or another for about ten years now. He began by restoring furniture and eventually bought a lathe to turn replacement parts for a chair. Inspired by what he saw in *Fine Woodworking* magazine, and a growing pile of wood, David eventually pulled the lathe from the corner and began turning the bowls for which he has become so well known. Furniture-making was a natural progression and now rounds out his repertoire of restoration and turning.

David's approach to design is interesting in that he doesn't strive for originality. Preferring to consider his works as a series of

collaborations between all the craftspeople who have influenced him, David believes that those who are trying to be entirely original are not true to themselves and produce work without roots or soul. Describing his design process as "simply putting the parts together," David refines elements appropriated from both historical and contem-

Garry Knox Bennett's tongue-in-cheek approach is refreshing and hopefully shakes up the technically-obsessed furniture maker in the same proportion as it delights the trend-conscious art critic.

porary furniture in a continuing evolution of design and form. At the same time, however, David notes that he despises plagiarism, considering it dishonest and an easy out.

David's ladderback chairs have been directly inspired by those of Ernest Gimson of the Cotswold tradition. The seats, hand woven with natural rush, complement the turned legs and rails and the gently shaped back splats. What makes these chairs distinctive is the subtle alterations and refinements that have occurred through the maker's intimacy with the individual parts during their production. Indicative of the hybrid nature of Ron David's work, his rockers could be described as a Gimson/Maloof cross.

With a diverse background that includes commercial art, taxidermy and forestry, Doug Taylor of Livelong, Saskatchewan, has been making furniture for about two years now. Describing the recent change in his furniture designs, Taylor says that he has progressed from a traditional use of the materials to a contemporary style in which he likes to challenge the medium.

Taylor's designs are often very material dependant, inspired by whatever is at hand. Often, this means material that is overlooked by others, such as firewood, discarded boards, and so on. "Co-workers at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum used to laugh at the stuff I'd salvage from the Museum's dumpster," recalls Taylor. "I've used some of these materials in some of my most successful pieces." In what may be called a constructivist approach, Taylor, often working without

sketches, may take a few weathered boards and start to work them with no particular goal in mind. The result may be a chair leg, table top, or some other element that might inspire the rest of a design. A recent experiment with turning pine firewood on the lathe, for instance, led to the creation of table legs and the possibility that much of Taylor's woodpile may never see the inside of a stove.

Like Bennett and David, Taylor deliberately takes an open, playful approach to his craft. Besides working with white willow to produce chairs, Taylor is constantly exploring the use various manufactured materials including metal, medium-density fibreboard, and solid timber. As might be expected from someone who has always sketched and painted, colour figures prominently in Taylor's work. His experience as a museum technician and taxidermist exposed him to materials such as the polymer lacquers used to achieve an iridescent effect in painting stuffed fish.

Selling most of his work through shows, Taylor has slowly lost interest in commissions because they often entail the production of multiples. This spring, two of Taylor's pieces, the steel-framed *Constellate Chair* (a collaboration with welder Paul Bec from Livelong, Saskatchewan) and the *Painted Ladderback Chair* made of white-willow and medium-density fibreboard, were selected for the juried exhibition, "Dimensions '94," and both won awards.

A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

As any biologist can tell you, it is the diversity in an ecosystem that guarantees its success and ongoing development. The diversity of approach embraced by contemporary designer-makers who have taken up the challenge of combining function with form, desire with need, physical constraints with personal expression, may be the very thing that ensures the survival of their craft into the twenty-first century and beyond. □

Doug Haslam is a designer craftsman in wood and freelance writer from Calgary, Alberta.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT *Cabinet* (1992), found wooden box, wood, metal, by Garry Knox Bennett. Photo courtesy of the artist.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT *Half-moon Table* (1994), medium-density fibreboard, poplar, acrylic, enamel, by Doug Taylor. Photo: Menno Fieguth.

OPPOSITE MIDDLE RIGHT *Zig-zag Table* (1994), medium-density fibreboard, black spruce, acrylic, enamel, by Doug Taylor. Photo: Menno Fieguth.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM *Partners' Desk* (1991), plastic, metal, wood, by Garry Knox Bennett. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Exhibitions



Uncommon Threads

By MYRNA GENT

The Tapestry Group

"Uncommon Threads: A Tapestry Exhibition"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
January 7 to February 16, 1994

In January, the coldest month of the year, and this one the coldest in decades, six weavers from Saskatoon warmed the walls of the Saskatchewan Craft Gallery with their tapestries. The show was not organized around a single theme or philosophy, but instead presented the diverse work of a group of women who had studied with Ann Newdigate in the fall of 1989. After the class, the women continued to work separately, but with the common goal of presenting an exhibition of their work. Hence the title, "Uncommon Threads."

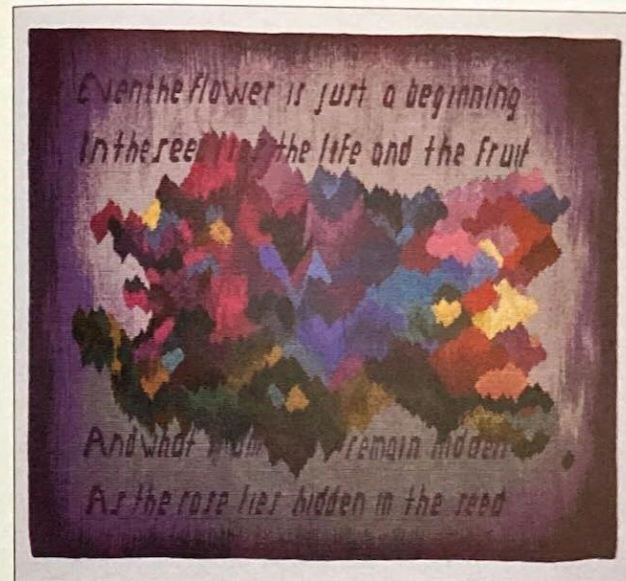
The weavers in "Uncommon Threads" used a variety of methods to hang their tapestries. Cathryn Miller, Lois Kennedy-Paine, and Judy Haraldson chose the traditional method of attaching the tapestry to an unobtrusive bar that allows the work to hang flat under its own weight. Ingrid MacNeill stitched her two works to canvas and in one, *Mountain Fishing* (1993), added embroidery to the canvas mat. Shirley Spidla mounted her single piece, "and they were of the earth" (1993), in a frame she painted to extend the woven design, while Marie Sadoway used the traditional approach for one of her works and framed two others in shallow shadow-boxes.

The Tapestry Group members do not all have the same degree of experience in the tapestry medium. A serious weaver since 1986, Lois Kennedy-Paine was uncomfortable using colour only three or four years ago, but no one could say that today after seeing *Roswitha's Garden* (1992). The piece shows the influence of Ann Newdigate not only in the highly expressive use of colour but also in the inclusion of written words: "Even a flower is just a beginning/In the seed lies the life and the fruit/And what I am must remain hidden/As the rose lies hidden in the seed." Words were also a new element in the visual vocabulary of Cathryn Miller, a full-time weaver since 1974, who incorporated the words "Six-Bar Wrasse" and "one fish, two fish" in her weavings by the same names. Kennedy-Paine and Miller will both have to decide for themselves whether their words will wear well in the future and are worth the trouble of their inclusion.

Cathryn Miller is one of the most active exhibitors in the group. She has participated in over 30 juried and curated exhibitions since 1974, and her tapestries are included in numerous public and private collections around the world. A prolific artist in a painstaking medium, Miller had five weavings in the exhibition: two of these were from the "Pink Rock" series, while three others—*Autumn Creek* (1993), *Six-Bar Wrasse* (1993), and *one fish, two fish* (1993)—featured fish as the main subject matter. At first glance, the "Pink Rock" series appears to be minimalist in nature, with each piece providing a close-up view of part of a rock. Closer examination of *Pink Rock #2* (1992), however, reveals that each close-up holds a world in itself, with the curved silhouette of the partial rock being echoed in miniature circles throughout the piece. The colours also seem minimal, restricted to single shades of pink and green. But again, things are more complex than they seem from a distance. At close range, a variety of subtle colours appear on the surface, the result of using blended yarns.

Shirley Spidla has been involved in various aspects of spinning, weaving, and dyeing since 1972 and has, over the years, participated regularly in group exhibitions of both art and craft. In addition to Ann Newdigate, Spidla has attended workshops with Archie Brennan, Marcel Marois, Debora Forbes, Anne Clark, and Jane A. Evans. The title of Spidla's tapestry, "and they were of the earth," invited viewers to search a marvellous woven landscape for inhabitants, enabling them to participate in the piece and creating a sense of fun. The extension of the design out onto the wide wooden frame likewise shows a playful spirit, though the painted elements seemed to reduce rather than strengthen the formal unity of the piece.

A weaver since 1985, Judy Haraldson has devoted a great deal of time to tapestry since taking Newdigate's workshop. She studied



LEFT *Roswitha's Garden* (1992), tapestry, cotton warp, wool weft, 91 centimetres in height, 101 centimetres in width, by Lois Kennedy-Paine.
BOTTOM *Six-Bar Wrasse* (1993), tapestry, cotton/polyester warp, wool weft, 47 centimetres in height, 102 centimetres in width, by Cathryn Miller
OPPOSITE *Autumn Tundra* (1993), slit tapestry, polyester and cotton warp, wool weft, 75 centimetres in height, 60 centimetres in width, by Judy Haraldson.

Mountain Fishing is irregularly shaped, with tiny bits of embroidery added to the canvas mat. This was an interesting touch that perhaps needed to be carried a bit further to be entirely convincing.

In the mid to late 1980s, Lois Kennedy-Paine was working hard to master the basics of weaving, participating in workshops in weaving, dyeing, felting, and spinning, and has since gone on to study colour theory with Diane Mortensen and, in 1991, took a master class in tapestry with Archie Brennan. Kennedy-Paine's work has been seen in various juried exhibitions and has been featured in one solo exhibition.

These days, Kennedy-Paine is devoting much of her time to tapestry. The design for Kennedy-Paine's *Prairie Sunset* (1991), based on a photograph by Courtney Milne, is a celebration of light and colour.

Another landscape, *Howe Sound Sunset—Gambier Island* (1991), displays marvellous shading and great technical control over the medium. *Reclining Woman* (1992), a woven drawing of a nude, effectively conveys the feeling of smudged charcoal on paper, but the drawing itself is unfortunately not up to the standard of the weaving.

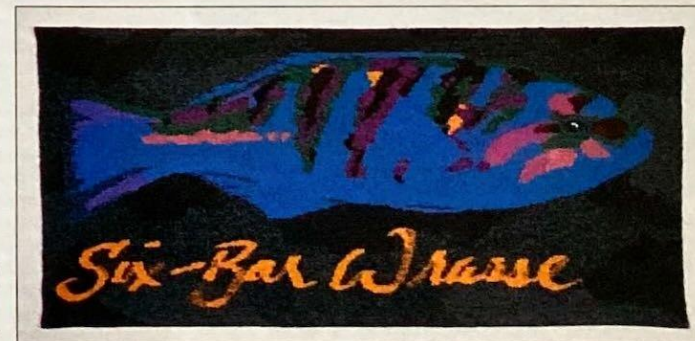
Although Marie Sadoway first began taking classes in drawing and oil painting at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1950, she did not begin studying weaving until 1973, when she took an introductory course in the use of the backstrap loom. Shortly thereafter, Sadoway purchased her own four-harness floor loom and began learning how to weave small household items such as placemats and rugs by following the instructions in Mary Black's *Key to Weaving*. Since taking Newdigate's workshop, however, Sadoway has devoted most of her time and energy to tapestry.

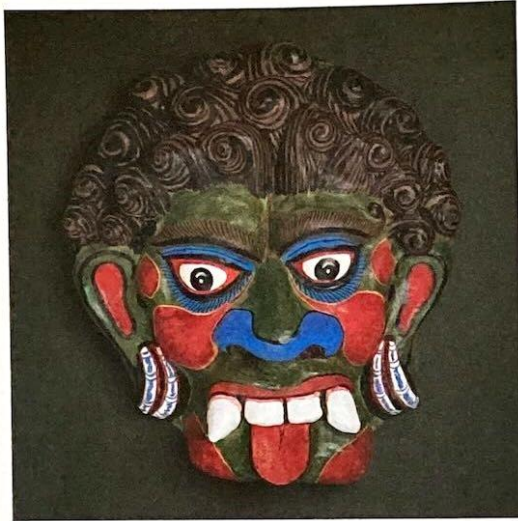
Sadoway's three tapestries in "Uncommon Threads" all featured complex organic designs inspired by nature. In the pastel-coloured *Earth Mother* (1992), Sadoway created an intricate design using the seemingly simple technique of cutting through an informal grid with sweeping, curved lines, and then treating the resulting shapes as distinct compositional elements. A woven border in a neutral colour

weaving at the SIAST Woodland Campus in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, for four years and has participated in a number of local juried exhibitions. A multi-talented craftsman, she even hand-spun the wool for *Storm Pattern* (1991), a bold, Navaho-style wall hanging done in black, grey, and natural wool, with red accents. Haraldson followed a traditional concept by making one corner of the geometric design different from the other three. Red tassels at each corner add a light, festive touch. In *Autumn Tundra* (1993), possibly her strongest piece in the show, Haraldson uses a grid of diamond shapes framed by a neutral grey border as the scaffold for an subtle arrangement of greens, golds, and earth tones, with complementary red accents. *Prairie Oblique* (1993) is a small, stylized woven landscape distinguished by an eccentric blue river that wanders across brown and green fields along with a white line that stretches from border to border across the sky. Finally, *Watching* (1993) finds the artist working in a linear style, presenting us with a simple and elegant cat.

As a textiles major at the Alberta College of Art from 1978 to 1981, Ingrid MacNeill took courses in an astonishing variety of disciplines, including weaving, spinning and dyeing, papermaking, feltmaking, silkscreening, batik, French dyes, ceramics, history, drawing, and design. MacNeill's woven works are currently devoted solely to tapestry, a medium in which she has definitely developed her own style.

MacNeill works in a much finer warp sett than the other weavers in the exhibition, a technique which allows for much greater detail. Here is a weaver who is not afraid to use colour: I counted forty-six distinct colour areas in one weft shot in the long, narrow piece entitled *Four Seasons* (1993). Special consideration had to be given to hanging these delicate works, which are too light to hang flat under their own weight as a normal tapestry would. The top edge of MacNeill's





smaller piece entitled *Inner Fire* (1991), Sadoway has used a more formal grid structure as the basis for an intriguing design that gives the impression of fire reflected on the surface of a lake and has all the richness of stained glass. More representational in its subject matter, *Sunlit Woods* (1991) is an extremely complex piece with subtle colours that successfully convey the feeling of bright sunlight streaming through a tangled stand of trees.

The only common threads displayed by the artists in this exhibition were their ongoing perseverance and patience in pursuing the demanding technique of tapestry weaving, their decision to produce small to medium sized, two-dimensional tapestries designed to fit the domestic environment, and their imaginative use of colour, shape, and texture. Their levels of aesthetic sophistication and technical expertise varied considerably, but they all deserve to be encouraged in their commitment to the ideal of personal expression and the search for beauty. □

Myrna Gent is a Saskatoon-based weaver and a regular contributor to *The Craft Factor*.

Ritual Masks

By KATE HODGSON

Manjari Sharma

"Masks: Symbolic, Mythical, Contemporary"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
February 18 to March 29, 1994

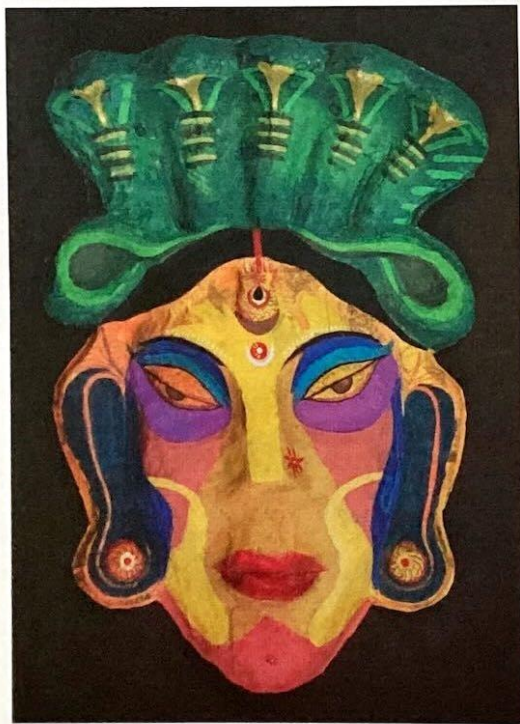
Like other viewers entering Manjari Sharma's exhibition "Masks: Symbolic, Mythical, Contemporary" in the Saskatchewan Craft Council Gallery during February and March of 1994, I stepped from Saskatoon's winter into a face-to-face encounter with demons, goddesses, and other awe-inspiring figures from Hindu cosmology.

Manjari Sharma has studied sculpture at the New Delhi College of Art, Cornell University, and the University of Saskatchewan. In 1991, aided by a Canada Council Art Exploration Grant, Sharma spent four months in India pursuing an interest in the masks which are such a strong component of art, theatre, and ritual in that country. She attended artists' workshops and visited regional tribal people or *Adivasi*, learning their mask-making techniques as well as researching the origins of the traditional cosmological figures she intended to depict in her masks. The resulting multi-layered exhibition gave viewers several entry points or opportunities to appreciate the material.

By way of introduction, Sharma provided written texts for each mask explaining the origin or significance of the figures portrayed. Excerpts from the epic narratives of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* illustrated the interrelationships of the masks and invited viewers into the context of the works.

Among many other deities, we meet Ravana, the ten-headed "demon" king of Sri Lanka, who transformed himself into a golden deer in order to distract Rama and kidnap Rama's wife, Sita. It is only with the aid of Hanuman, his faithful servant, noted for enormous strength and wisdom, that Rama eventually won his war with Ravana to regain Sita.

Sharma has produced a series of masks depicting Ravana: in *Maya-Mrig* (1992), the demon king takes the form of the golden deer; and in *Ravana I* (1993) and *Ravana II* (1993), he appears as the



ABOVE TOP *Hiranyakasipu II* (A Demon King) (1992), paper, paint, 28 centimetres in height, by Manjari Sharma.

ABOVE BOTTOM *Manasa Devi* (The Serpent Goddess) (1993), paper, paint, 40 centimetres in height, by Manjari Sharma.

OPPOSITE TOP *Ravana II* (1993), paper, pulp, orange and brown coloured soil, paint, 83 centimetres in width, by Manjari Sharma.



ten-headed king, the large central face of each mask being flanked on both sides by a number of smaller faces. In *Ravana I*, the dark patina which complements the forbidding expression was achieved by working gold, red, black, and deep-blue paint into the surface. The noses and brows repeat like a series of arches around the deep-set eyes, giving the mask a fortress-like appearance. An earlier avatar of Ravana is portrayed as a highly-coloured, detailed shape in two single-faced masks, *Hiranyakasipu I* (1992) and *Hiranyakasipu II* (1992).

Another series of masks portray Hanuman, the monkey-faced god and faithful servant of Rama. Rama awarded Hanuman with immortality for his faithfulness in the war with Ravana, and in *Hanuman II* (1993) and *Hanuman III* (1993), Sharma implies age and experience by working the surface with applied and abraded paint. In this way, she brings the materials and handling of materials together with the narrative content seamlessly.

The handling of materials provided another entry point for viewers. Sharma has exhibited extensively over the last twenty five years, exploring a variety of media from bronze casting and stone carving to painting and batik. In this mask exhibition, she brings her experience to bear on papier mâché and extends the vocabulary of the medium by combining traditional techniques and forms with the conscious experimentation typical of a contemporary sculptor.

The incorporation of different materials has an arresting affect on the look of the masks. The papier mâché is handled either in a layered manner or as paper pulp augmented by a variety of organic media such as sawdust, sand, or ashes. While some masks such as *Narasimha* (1991) and *Maa Durga* (1993) are smoothly finished and painted with vivid colours, others such as *Prithivi* (1992) and the *Adivasi* series (1993) are textured and ornamented with leather thongs, beads, shells, feathers, or horse hair. In masks such as *Ravana II*, natural orange or brown soils are used as pigments to colour the surface or are worked into the paper pulp itself.

Two of the masks in the *Hanuman* series have been fashioned of layered paper and then painted. A third is quite different. Beautifully wrought in paper pulp, sand, and sawdust, *Hanuman I* has the appearance of carved stone. The fine teeth in the wide smile of this mask are echoed in the tiny beading of the head dress and stylized shape of the eyebrows. The finished quality of the mask lies entirely in this attention to fine details of shape.

In her mask depicting *Manasa Devi*, the serpent goddess who protects people from sickness, epidemic diseases, and calamities, Sharma uses a simple technique to knit together the traditional and the contemporary. Within the curvilinear design on the face of *Manasa Devi* are areas of thinly-painted, layered papier mâché made out of the pages of a North American newspaper. By intentionally allowing traces of English text from the newspaper to show through

the paint, Sharma is able both to reveal her artistic process and to produce a subtle synthesis of two cultures. The newspaper provides us with a subtle invitation, a point of entry into part of Sharma's own roots, drawing us into the work by the use of something recognizable.

In her artist's statement, Sharma says that masks "represent an articulation between human beings, nature, and supernatural forces." For the wearer, the mask is a bridge between elemental ritual and human drama. Performing in a mask means assuming the power and magic of the numinous other figure within the context of the ritual or drama. But because the mask is worn by a human being, the wearer also recognizes that

the performance of the ritual provides a change in external appearance only and not a complete transformation. The wearer and the mask act together, mediating between the mythic and the mundane.

Although Sharma discusses this meaning in her artist's statement, the masks in the exhibition were displayed in cases or at eye-level on the gallery wall. As a result, any conversation takes place only between the mask, its materials, and the viewer, while the experience of the wearer is formally excluded. If there had been masks available for viewers to try on, it might have helped underscore their meaning as described in the statement and added another dimension to the show. Most of Sharma's masks, however, are whole faces without openings for the wearer's eyes. Rather, they have eyes to look back at the viewer, which gives them a different kind of presence from masks made to be worn. This presence of the persona gave the exhibition the feel of a gathering of figures rather than a collection of stage properties or sacred artifacts.

Sharma explains that, because many masks are abstractions from the natural features of animals or human faces, there are numerous correspondences from one culture to another. Whatever feeds this sense of the universal, I suspect other viewers stepping back into the winter sunshine, as I did, encountered the faces they met on the street in a new way. □

Kate Hodgson is a Saskatoon-based visual artist who works in papier mâché.

Collaborations

By SUSAN ROBERTSON

Zach Dietrich and Wendy Parsons

"Collaborations: The Mythical and the Classical Found in the Ceramic Works of Zach Dietrich and Wendy Parsons"
Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon
April 8 to May 10, 1994

When I was asked to review "Collaborations: The Mythical and the Classical Found in the Ceramic Works of Zach Dietrich and Wendy Parsons," I felt honoured and delighted. Upon hanging up the phone, the realization of the responsibility I had accepted weighed upon me. After all, could I be fair and impartial?

My personal preference for handbuilt, whimsical vessels makes me partial to Wendy Parsons' work, which I have always admired.

EXHIBITIONS

And while I have an appreciation for Zach Dietrich's work, functional vessels have always held less interest for me. I decided that I could be nothing other than what I am and put forth my biases in an attempt to overcome them.

The title of the show led me to expect all of the work would be collaborations. The exhibition statement, however, explained that the works in the exhibition "survey the impressive range of Dietrich's and Parsons' individual and joint production, revealing the many influences that have shaped their aesthetic development." Walking around the gallery and looking at the work, I discovered that the statement was accurate and my expectation had been wrong.

Certain that considerable thought had been given to the selection of the title, I looked up the word *collaborate* when I got home. To collaborate means "to work, one with another; cooperate." There is no doubt that living and working in the same environment would result in considerable daily interchange and definite cooperation; thus, in the broadest sense, one could accept "collaboration."

My overall sense of the show was, for Parsons, a continuation of her work: nothing unexpected, but delightful work nonetheless. With Dietrich's work, I was impressed by the incredible interaction of surface decoration and form, something new from him, which we only had hints of before. The collaborations, meanwhile, provided both typical and pleasant surprises.

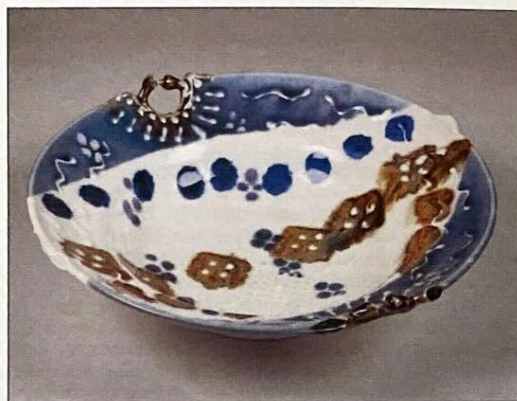
My understanding of Parsons and Dietrich's working method is that Dietrich throws the form and Parsons completes the decoration and glazing. I believe that it is their decision to work relatively independently on their collaborative pieces that has made them so successful at melding two very different styles—classical and funk.

The collaborative work included typical pieces such as the *Monster Tea Pot* (1993) and matching *Monster Cream and Sugar* (1993) that epitomize the makers' technical skill and highlight Parsons' decorative techniques. Another collaboration, *Monster Jar*, (1993) demonstrated acceptable form and integration of elements, but I found it to be less successful. *Sitting Pig* (1993) was an old friend revisited, but its charming facial expression still brought a smile.

A series of vases thrown by Dietrich and decorated by Parsons were generally somewhat weaker than their other collaborative works. *Small Vase #1* (1993) presented a traditional form with definite oriental influences. The design appeared to have been sprigged and incised on the surface, highlighted by a cobalt wash and clear glaze. Unfortunately, a bulge in the wall of the vase created an interruption in the line of the form which I found distracting. Another traditional form with oriental influences was the *Large Green Vase* (1993). Again, an undulation in the form disturbed the restfulness of the celadon green glaze pooling into the surface decoration. A better form was found in *Large Vase #2* (1993) and I came away with feeling of the "mystical" associated with the surface decoration. I felt that the glazing patterns did not quite fit with the strength of the form, creating a visual "ending" where the form continued.

The most interesting of the collaborative vases were the *Jardiniere* (1993) and *Large Vase #1* (1993). The strength of these pieces lay in the surface decoration, a delightful interplay and use of stains, airbrushed and painted on the glaze to produce a delicate balance of shape, line, and colour. Again, there was an interruption in the visual line of the forms, but the finishing was so successful that it was able to carry the pieces. It is important to note that the size of these pieces, in particular the *Jardiniere*, makes them technically difficult to produce. Even an extremely proficient thrower would probably think twice before attempting them.

The one vase not collaborated on was *Small Vase #2*, a needle nose piece by Dietrich that was graceful and well thought out. Unfortunately, the wonderful surface decoration was only placed on one side



of the vessel, giving the piece a frontal character that seemed incongruous to the form.

In the past, Parsons and Dietrich have captivated us by turning their talents to producing fountains. This show included *Large Fountain* (1993), which featured a wall-mounted fish spewing water into a bowl. I liked the subtlety of colour but would like to have seen more consideration given to the technical aspects of the fountain itself. An interruption of water flow to create a tinkling sound, as opposed to that of a little boy relieving himself in a pond, would have been a soothing change. The mounting system and loose attachment of the fish to the bowl also created some concern.

Dietrich presented especially strong bowls and platters. *Blue Bowl* (1993) displayed a skilful combination of painterly surface treatments. An incised bowl with slip decoration and rudimentary handles was covered in a glaze that produced a wonderful depth of colour. The decoration continued to the undersurface, which, to my mind, is the mark of a true artisan: consideration of the overall form.

In Dietrich's *Pool* (1993), we again see the attention to the overall surface. I especially liked the shape and the cut outs. Unfortunately, I found that the interruption of the decoration for the placement of his signature on the bottom awkward. The humorous *Piranha #2* (1993) with its cutouts and teeth displays a delicate layering of oxides that speaks well of Dietrich's skill with an airbrush. I was disappointed, however, that the decoration did not continue to the underside of the bowl. Less successful was *Fish Bowl* (1993). While

EXHIBITIONS



ABOVE (L TO R) *Dragon Jar #1* (1993) and *Dragon Jar #2* (1993), clay, by Zach Dietrich and Wendy Parsons.

OPPOSITE TOP *Puffer Fish* (1993), clay, 22 centimetres in diameter, by Wendy Parsons.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM *Fertilization #2* (1993), clay, 28 centimetres in diameter, by Zach Dietrich.

presenting a nice "fish bowl" shape, the piece would have benefitted from a different colour scheme, perhaps similar to that used in *Piranha #2* or *Pool*.

A number of pieces, including the *Handled Platter* (1993), *Fertilization #1* (1993), *Fertilization #2* (1993), and the *Black Platter* (1993) that appeared on the cover of the SCC *Bulletin* in April, provided excellent examples of good form integrated with complex and interesting surface treatment. *White Jar* (1993) and *Blue Spotted Jar* (1993) were obviously attempts at translating some of the techniques used on the platters to different forms. Though these pieces are not as strong as the bowls and platters, they hold much promise for the future.

In a series of four small sculptures, Parsons has turned her attention to the ultimate of Canadian winter pastimes, hockey and skating. *The Whip Area* (1993), which was featured on the cover of SCC *Bulletin* in February, *Coaches* (1993), *Fallen Skater* (1993), and *Putting on Skates* (1993), each interpret these activities with anthropomorphized animals. Each figure has its own distinct personality and each sculpture portrays a situation we have all seen—or as in the case of the fallen skater, experienced! All are fine examples of the technical skill and complex painting style characteristic of Parsons's work.

Less interesting to me as I had seen much of this work before, or at least work similar to it, were *Mother Goose Book* (1993), *Jimmy's Boa Book* (1993), *Flying Dragon* (1993), *Dragon Pals* (1994), and *Dragon* (1994). *Barn Yard Plaque* (1993) and *Pig in the Hen House Plaque* (1993) continue Parsons' farm yard animal series of wall pieces we have seen before, only now on a much larger scale. While Parsons continues to capture the substance of the animals with a great deal of humour, the size of the work has presented some problems. Too large to be fired in one piece, the pieces have been divided into square sections and then reassembled with plaster; however, the pieces would have been stronger if the divisions had been integrated into the designs rather than imposed upon them.

Chicken #1 (1993), *Chicken #2* (1993), and the two *Baby Chicks* (1994) best represent what I really enjoy in Parsons's work: the

ability to capture the essence of the animal and portray it in a humorous manner with great attention to detail. The chickens were also much larger than much of her work, somewhat closer to life sized.

One piece that was somewhat atypical for Parsons was the *Puffer Fish* (1993). This work was similar to two works exhibited in the 1990 exhibition, "This is For the Birds: An Exhibition of Garden Ornaments." I was delighted by the work then and was pleased to see a return to the puffer-fish form. I did, however, find the colour a bit too subtle for my tastes and remember the earlier works as being a little stronger. I would encourage Parsons to continue playing with this idea, which seems to me to have a lot of potential.

Deliberately not mentioned previously were the collaborative pieces *Dragon Jar #1* (1993) and *Dragon Jar #2* (1993). These

were strong forms, lidded jars with mythical creatures as decorative knobs and feet additions that nicely complemented the main shapes. These forms were influenced by traditional incense jars, which explains the celadon-type glaze finish. Given Parsons's penchant for and use of strong colour, and Dietrich's growing understanding of colour and texture, I wondered why the finishing treatment of these pieces was so bland. I began to wonder about what would have happened had these pieces been thrown by Dietrich, decorated by Parsons, and then passed back to Dietrich for the final surface treatment. Would the extra step produce a new level of collaboration from this pair? I find this thought fascinating and would challenge Dietrich and Parsons to consider it. I eagerly look forward to the fruits of their future labours. □

Susan Robertson is a potter from Outlook, Saskatchewan, where she owns and operates the Wrinkle in Thyme Gift Emporium.

Hot Glass

By BRENDA BARNES AND BILL POPIEL

Bonny Houston

"Colours in the Wind"

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon

May 13 to June 14, 1994

The solo exhibition "Colours in the Wind" presented a generous selection of exquisite blown-glass pieces by Bonny Houston, an award-winning artist with a passion and talent for working with hot glass.

Watching a glass blower is akin to watching a ballet dancer. Control and timing are everything. The soft glass is always stiffening, always bending to the earth, always changing colour. But the glass blower is both dancer and choreographer. Using a combination of gathering, forming, blowing, and reheating, the glass blower shapes the glass according to her will.

From her symmetrical and free-form vessels to her intricate ceremonial "talking sticks," life-like *nettai go*, and free-form solids, Houston shows a marvellous ability to produce subtle forms and



colours, the result of her intensive, disciplined study of her medium.

Houston first began working in hot glass after taking summer classes at the Sheridan College School of Design in Ontario, in the early 1980s. Attracted by Japanese art, Houston then studied at the Tokyo Glass Art institute in 1987 and 1988 and apprenticed to a Japanese glass blower. Her recent work clearly shows the influence of her practice and studies in Japan.

One of Houston's specialties is the production of Japanese-inspired *nettai gyo*, representations of tropical fish in hand-blown glass. The intensely-coloured fish were displayed both on the sill of the front window in the gallery and in a large, commercially-produced tank filled with water, sand, and colourful glass plants. The placement of the *nettai gyo* in an actual fish tank seems to have been intended to make them seem more like real fish. This was not entirely successful, however, as the fish all sat sullenly in the sand at the bottom of the tank.

More interesting were the wide variety of glass vessels in the exhibition. *Memories of The Sea* (1993) [see front cover], a free-flowing, wavelike vessel with a beautiful swirl of colours, seems to mimic an abalone shell laying on a rock in the pounding surf. The billowing shape conveys a trance-like quality that captivates and draws the viewer closer, inviting us to examine the array of coloured frits frozen below the semitransparent pink interior. The limestone base provides a wonderful complement to the piece and a functional support.

Moon Dancers—Emerald Ruby Wave (1993) is a delightful glass paperweight. The fascination of paperweights seems to derive from the combination of a solid, three-dimensional quality with an ability to reflect and refract light and present the illusion of an inner landscape. Here the emerald and ruby swirl of complimentary colours provides a base for the white winged cloud to shield. The glass has good clarity, with almost no stress lines evident from the layering process used in its forming. The smoothly-polished exterior provides excellent optics for viewing the relationships between the silver, emerald, and ruby colours, which constantly change their positions as you move around the piece, presenting an interesting view from every angle, dancing and swirling around in their glass-encased world.

One of the larger pieces in the show, *Music in The Grass #2* (1993) is a distinctive vase that combines glasswork with sandblasting. The calligraphic "grass" that stretches like blue stringers across the powder-pink glass walls gives the piece an intense, moody quality. Houston has chosen to tone down the colours of the vase by sandblasting the outside. This blends the white and blue branches in the side of the vase, giving them a willowy appearance. Peeking inside reveals a three-dimensional image of the blue grass set apart from the sandblasted background. This effect is only achievable in glass and is quite often emphasized in blown vessels. In fact, the interior is more exciting than the exterior, and the piece may have been even more appealing done inside out.

In her talking sticks, Houston combined a variety of blown glass forms into small totem-pole like objects that effectively convey the spiritual essence of First Nations art without seeming derivative. Although the talking sticks were all individually interesting, a number of them were unfortunately crowded into a single small display case, making it nearly impossible for viewers to appreciate them. In fact, this lack of selectivity affected the entire exhibition, which would have benefitted from some judicious pruning. There's a lesson to be learned: sixty pieces do not fit comfortably into an irregularly shaped, 800 square foot space.

Presentation aside, Houston's glass-blowing skill was clearly evident in "Colours in the Wind." Her successful combination traditional glass-blowing techniques with modern, Native, and Japanese design styles, reveals the unlimited aesthetic potential of a sensitive, cross-cultural approach to craftmaking. □

Brenda Barnes works in glass and is the owner and operator of Glassworks Stained Glass Studio in Saskatoon.

Bill Popiel is Past President of the Saskatoon Glassworkers Guild and is a glass blowing and stained glass hobbyist.



LEFT AND BELOW *Not by Bread Alone* (1993), two of four embroidered bread fabric panels, by Dianna Frid.
OPPOSITE TOP *Moon Dancers—Emerald Ruby Wave* (1993), hand-blown glass, 8 centimetres in diameter, by Bonny Houston.
OPPOSITE BOTTOM *Music in the Grass #2* (1993), hand-blown glass, 43 centimetres in height, by Bonny Houston.



Figuring B.C. Fibre

By PAULA GUSTAFSON

"Go Figure"

Curated by Ann Rosenberg
Canadian Craft Museum, Vancouver
March 10 to June 12, 1994

"Go Figure" at the Canadian Craft Museum featured the work of eight British Columbia artists in mop cotton, tortillas, and sliced bread, along with the more usual craft media of metal, paper, wood, glass, and clay. Curated by former *Vancouver Sun* newspaper art critic Ann Rosenberg, the show was "concerned with the figure in obvious and inobvious [sic] ways."

The works obviously reflecting the human form were Ruth Scheuing's oversize metal dress bodices and dismantled men's wear, Charmian Johnson's playful ceramic gargoyles, and Michael Dennis's dancing cedar sculptures which graced the Museum's courtyard. William Koochin's wood and bronze masks and Dianne Cacchioni's photo-transfers on handmade paper presented the human figure by way of representational portraiture.

Less obviously connected to the exhibition theme were Dianna Frid's edibles about fertility, ecology, recycling, and how to fold seven tortillas into the shape of a boat, and Jean MacRae's knitted representations of urban artifacts.

Dianna Frid presented a fleet of boats embroidered with the names of the Mexican women who had supplied her with the homemade tortillas. Other examples of Frid's inventive use of

materials included a *Tea Shirt* sewn from used tea bags (a visual pun that worked) and a girl's one-piece bathing suit covered with eggshells (a visual pun that didn't work).

These transpositions of materials were clever, but it was Frid's four-panel *Not by Bread Alone* wall hanging, incorporating embroidery on dried slices of white bread, that offered a revitalizing look at craft's dual nature of process and product. Based on the adage "man cannot live by bread alone," Frid's banner-like formal arrangements used the subject of food to emphasize "the connectedness of all systems in the universe."

By contrast, Jean MacRae's *plein-air* knitting was more process oriented. Although the exhibition brochure stated that there were twelve blueprint information sheets, these were actually fifteen documentations of MacRae's *Two Walking Days* (in April 1991 and March 1992), when she mapped and measured a variety of Vancouver landmarks, including a parking-lot sign, the Terry Fox Memorial, and a rock in front of an apartment building, and then knitted a panel depicting the outline of each. Along with the graphed knitting pattern, MacRae provided a street address, time, weather report, and knitting instructions, e.g., "Sat on the curb across the street and measured out 4050 cm of mop cotton. Doubled it, cast on 40 stitches, and knit 6 rows in stocking-knit [sic] stitch for border. Began pattern using pearl [sic] stitch and continued to knit until all the cotton had been used up. Cast off last row and left any extra hanging at the side. Walked home."

Ruth Scheuing, a textiles instructor at Capilano College, offered a critical look at social customs and feminist politics as they relate to gender-specific clothing. By ripping open the seams of male business attire and presenting the components of a suit-jacket as an abstract



composition on the wall, Scheuing laid out "the graphic contours of patterns which represent the body."

Similarly, Scheuing's replicas of nineteenth century dress patterns in aluminum flashing secured by small nuts and bolts, with the bolt ends protruding uncomfortably inside the armour-like sculptures, questioned fashion, form, and, unfortunately, the reliability of the exhibition's texts, which insisted that the bodices were constructed with pop rivets.

The flower-printed fabric included as a decorative element in Scheuing's display added a welcome splash of colour in what was otherwise a remarkably monochromatic exhibition. Koochin's five polychromed faces, and the small stained-glass panels by Stephanie Rogers of Fernie, BC, provided a few other brief touches of colour. Outside the gallery, it was another story. On the courtyard lawn, Michael Dennis's painted and stained calligraphic dancers gestured and beckoned for attention.

"Go Figure" was the debut exhibition for Ann Rosenberg as the Canadian Craft Museum's 1994 guest curator. In her introduction to the exhibition, Museum Director Cheryl Ryll states that "Go Figure" provides an example of Rosenberg's "wide connection in the Vancouver art community, a network that includes established and emerging artists who work in many different mediums." Ryll also notes that the artists in "Go Figure" are "not normally associated with the craft world, however all eight were invited to participate because of their interest in traditional or non-traditional forms of craftsmanship."

Given these parameters, viewers might indeed question the curatorial notions of craftsmanship, traditional or not, that were employed in the selection of the exhibition. One of the least craftsmanly, and thus one of the most questionable choices, was Jean MacRae's knitting project.

MacRae's background, according to Rosen-

ABOVE *Dancing Figures* (1993), installation view, "Go Figure," at the Canadian Craft Museum, by Michael Dennis.

RIGHT *Two Walking Days* (1993), installation view, "Go Figure," at the Canadian Craft Museum, by Jean MacRae. Photos: Tony Au, and Ming Pao Sunday Magazine.

berg, is in surveying and geography and she is currently an education student at the University of British Columbia. As a conceptual project, MacRae's *Two Walking Days* knitting her way around Vancouver has significance as an art-making exercise, an imaginative game of doing and seeing. The manner in which MacRae's work was presented—wall-mounted outlines and text on paper—without question conformed to standard postmodern gallery methodology. But the question is, where is the craft?

Ever since I first saw Evelyn Roth's crocheted videotape three decades ago, I have been more than willing to give artists a little slack when they are attempting to break through the confines of traditional craft techniques or materials. At the same time, I have continued to look for some depth of understanding of craft's historical roots on which the craft maker's inventiveness feeds. Just as classical ballet is the touchstone from which modern dance has both evolved and rebelled, so contemporary craft artists need the underpinnings of craft's rich heritage in order to envision the possibilities for craft arts in terms of today's visual culture.

In the technical/instructional context in which MacRae presented her project, that means knowing the names for knitting stitches and achieving a higher level of accuracy in recording measurements and making patterns.

Perversely, I spent a couple of hours duplicating one of MacRae's patterns, *8100 cm of Oriental Rock*, using exactly the same yardage and needles she specified and knitting to the same gauge. After allowing for any other subtle discrepancies between her hand knitting and mine, I still had 28 metres of yarn left over when I was done.

I'll admit it was unworthy of me to be so nit-picky about what is, in essence, a conceptual work. But the unaccounted yarn left a dangling uncertainty about the craft arts being exhibited under the rubric of our national craft museum, where viewers quite reasonably anticipate an opportunity to see works that reflect and represent, at least, the minimum attributes of good craftsmanship and design. □

Paula Gustafson is a Vancouver-based freelance writer and editor who is currently the visual arts critic for *The Georgia Straight*



Saskatchewan Craft Gallery

Schedule

IN THE GALLERY

"DIMENSIONS '94"

Annual open juried exhibition of Saskatchewan craft
36 works by 30 craftspeople
Jurors: Lou Lynn and Michael Hosaluk
Organized by the Saskatchewan Craft Council
July 29 to September 6, 1994

SASKATCHEWAN EMBROIDERERS' GUILD

"The Magic of the Needle"

Includes works representing 12 regional guilds
September 9 to October 18, 1994
Opening Reception: Friday, September 9, 7-9 PM
Artists' Talk: Sunday, September 18, 1 PM

DELORES NORMAN

"Wall Rugs and Willows"

Hand-hooked rugs and willow furnishings
October 21 to November 29, 1994
Opening Reception: October 21, 7-9 PM

"MADE FOR A CAUSE"

Touring exhibition curated by Sandra Flood
December 2, 1994, to January 10, 1995
Opening Reception: December 2, 1994, 7-9 PM

SUSAN CLARK

Hand-dyed textiles
January 27 to March 7, 1995

KAIJA SANELMA HARRIS

Woven quilts
March 10 to April 25, 1995

SCC TOURING EXHIBITIONS

"DIMENSIONS '94"

Annual open juried exhibition of Saskatchewan craft
36 works by 30 craftspeople
Jurors: Lou Lynn and Michael Hosaluk
Organized by the Saskatchewan Craft Council

Saskatchewan Craft Gallery, Saskatoon, SK
July 29 to September 6, 1994

Godfrey Dean Cultural Centre, Yorkton, SK
September 15 to October 31, 1994

Opening Reception: Sunday, October 16, 2 PM

JOINT SCC/OSAC TOURING EXHIBITION

"CRAFT COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS II"

Includes furniture by Jamie Russell,
tapestries by Annabel Taylor, quilts by Lynn Underwood,
and clay works by Ardin Howard

Schedule currently unavailable.
Watch for details this fall.

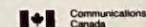
"DIMENSIONS '94" CATALOGUE

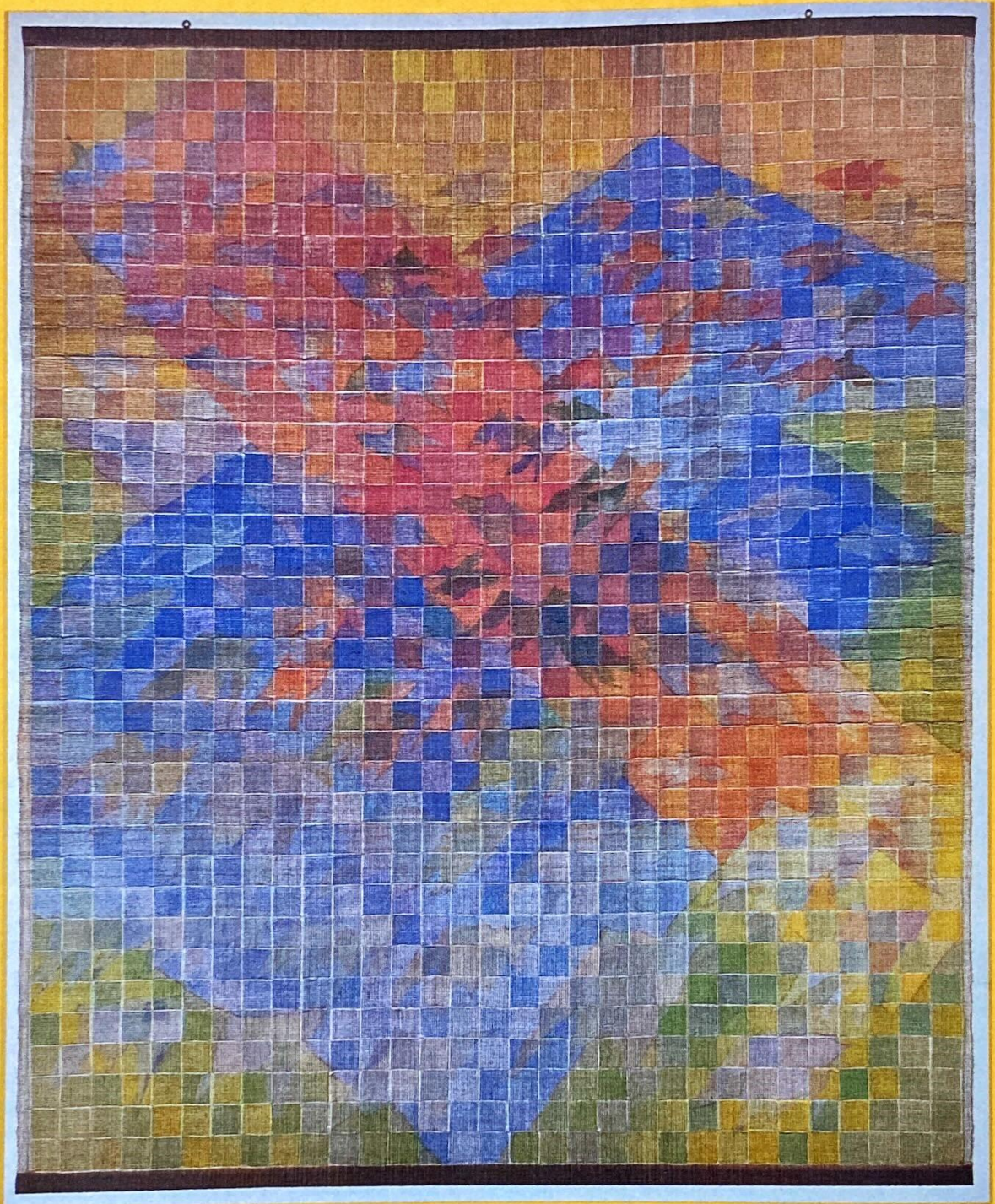
Copies of the catalogue, which includes profiles of the jurors,
a jurors' statement, colour photographs of every piece in the
exhibition, and profiles of the award-winning craftspeople,
will be available at each showing of "Dimensions '94."
Be sure to pick up a catalogue when you visit the exhibition.



SASKATCHEWAN CRAFT COUNCIL

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