



Cara Sawka, detail, 'Ghost Artist', installation. Fabric, paper machée, foam, wood. 2007-08



Christopher Campbell Gardiner, 'Timothy Long... A Long Wait & Notluge.' Dimensions: Seen - 58.4 cm (width) x 78.7" (length) x 152.4 cm (depth) / Unseen: to be later determined Materials: Seen - Wood, varnish, glass, photograph, locking mechanism at rear / Unseen: To be determined by curator Timothy Long only if the work enters the Mackenzie Art Gallery's permanent collection. 2008-2010

THREAD -- BOUND

September 2 - October 16, 2010

Martha Cole
 Christopher Campbell Gardiner
 June Jacobs
 Leanne Lloyd
 Judy McNaughton
 Sheila Nourse
 Dale Roberts
 Cara Sawka
 Karen Tam
 Kristina Thornton



Kristina Thornton, detail, 'Struggle Series, less than 20 x 27.9 cm, Embroidery on textile, 2008

ART
 GALLERY
 OF REGINA

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THREAD -- BOUND

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Sheila Nourse, 'Reminiscence of Mothers and Daughters', 45.7 cm w x 122 cm h, Mixed media, 2010



Karen Tam, 'The Canadian Pacific Railway: The Only Route Between the East and the West', 46 cm x 73.5 cm, Embroidery floss, rice bag, 2002-03

Cover: Dale Roberts, 'Distorts', installation. Variable dimensions. Range of materials such as household utensils, toys, net floats, driftwood, fishing net, rope, twine, cotton, wool, acrylic, ink, encaustic, cardboard, wood, wire. 2005-2010

THREAD -- BOUND

Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?

- Olive Schreiner, From Man to Man, c. 1889

The exhibition, *Thread--Bound*, joins together the artwork of ten artists who, in some manner, employ thread within their practice to create imagery, fashion objects or fasten parts. Embroidery, needlework, sewing and weaving all have rich and deep artistic histories that in Mediaeval times were the domain of both men and women and valued among the ranks of high art, like paintings of Western Art. Later, the Victorian legacy associated needlework to domesticity and feminine idealism and consigned these methods to the lower arts. But the critical work of theorists like Rosika Parker and Griselda Pollock, have helped to reconnect historical needlework to its Mediaeval legacy within the hierarchies of fine art because it is a 'cultural practice involving iconography, style and a social function'(p.6).¹ Within this exhibition, the artists have used stitching or other interlocking of threads as not just technical joinery but also as referential gestures that comment upon history, identities, gender, healing, confinement, labour, love and violence.

The work of **Kristina Thornton** (Montreal) references the traditional Victorian embroidered 'sampler' format in her soft contour thread drawings, *Struggle and Strain*. In contrast to depictions of ideal passive feminine stereotypes, Thornton presents individuals in states of poised physical self-defense against offending counterparts. Her imagery teeters upon resistance and embrace suggesting awkward pairing of self-preservation and surrender. Ultimately, Thornton's work challenges human relations in terms of violence and power with an unexpected, compromised ambivalence.

On the other hand, **Christopher Campbell Gardiner's** (Silton, SK) protectionism is far more extreme in his obsessively bundled and hermetically sealed 'anxiety containments'. Gardiner uses stitching as one of the processes that help contain materials attributed to the artist's anxiety. By puncturing and blanket stitching the edges of his container and texturing the surface with embroidered Braille clues, Gardiner fixatedly protects himself and others from the detriment of the objects inside. Enduring hours in this process, Gardiner is not lost in busy work but mindfully considers and counts each suture like wounds that close the content within - "I mend to hide and not reveal". Like all of Gardiner's work, the work in this exhibition, *Timothy Long... A Long Wait and Notluge*, leaves little for us to know about the container's contents, but allows the intentionality of the mystery to affect our awareness. It is this lack of knowing which becomes the complete and curative power of Gardiner's work.

June Jacobs (Meacham, SK) too, addresses containment through her textile-based work. The work, *Despite All Odds II*, presents a dress form made of white wool that is strictly bound to the ground. By interlocking the fibers through felting, Jacobs is able to create tactile volumes that suggest the space of the female body and is able to comment upon weight of feminine identities and roles in society. Her connection to her materials and process is historically based and also reflects a deep concern for nature and the earth.

Among the dualities evident in **Judy McNaughton's** (Prince Albert, SK) work, *Skins*, are the relationships between humans and animals as well as the corporeal and the spiritual. McNaughton stitches together sheepskin into the likeness of a human skull and, like Jacobs, tethers it to the ground with thin filament anchored by the weight of sheep bones. Her crude suturing recalls the fragility of our body as well the crucial corporeal similarities we share with other beings. Stemming from a background in the agrarian lifestyle, McNaughton questions the separateness between animals and humans despite our inherent interdependences and attempts to bind the separations closer.

Using free form crochet, weaving and knotting as methods, **Dale Roberts** (Victoria) creates en masse a series of sculpted forms weaving together a range of fibrous materials. Being influenced by the Maritime life of seaman and homemakers, Roberts integrates net making, knot tying and other 'hand made' methods to create his organic forms. In *Distorts*, he has created a society of biomorphic structures reminiscent of sea life, organisms, organs and utilitarian objects. Whimsical, tactile and sensual, this society continues to grow as Roberts continually adds to the collection with a penchant for work, experimentation and process.

Martha Cole (Lumsden, SK), who has been specializing in fabric and stitchery throughout the majority of her career, presents a series of quilted work and employs traditional and contemporary approaches to quilt work. What is unmistakable about Cole's work is her distinct respect of historical tapestry practices as evident in the care, love and attention imbued in her incredibly detailed work. Through her imagery of

nature's symbiotic structures, Cole emphasizes many ecological relationships and leads us into a mystical contemplation of our own associations with the world.

Stitching and weaving can be said to be an act of healing and love. **Sheila Nourse's** (Regina) work *Reminiscence of Mothers and Daughters*, reconstructs her grown daughter's old chair through netted stitchery and compiles a nest of bits and bobs of old playthings as a means to build fantasy, hope and comfort. Through this, Nourse contemplates her new identity as situated within the 'empty nest'. Unlike the reaffirmations of feminine duty of Victorian embroidery, Nourse dismantles and tests what it means to be a mother, nurturer and domestic holder.

Also concerned with female identities, artist **Leanne Lloyd** (Montreal/Regina), painstakingly stitches and weaves costumes and objects for her four fictional and performed multiple personae of Superwoman, 'a superhero and sex worker.' Featured in this exhibition is the costume of *Mother*, which is an area rug as well as cloak and hat for her fourth, most recent persona of Superwoman. It is constructed of 1000 pomegranate skins, dehydrated, preserved and pierced together laboriously and with ritual. From this time consuming process, Lloyd developed the character 'Mother', and then launched her in a performance in Paris in March, 2008 (other characters include 'CEO', 'Angel' and 'Princess'). In acts of un-staged and sometimes extensively lengthy public performances, Lloyd ultimately questions the sanctity of female archetypes whilst embracing her connection and ambivalence towards these culturally significant roles.

For **Cara Sawka** (Halifax), the labour and design work of others is at the focus of her mixed media installation, *Ghost Artist*. Giving credit to those whose unconsidered imagery and creativity is used on fabric, tapestry and upholstery work, Sawka acknowledges the 'ghost' artistry in our everyday functional objects. In this work, Sawka pays particular attention to the curtain's image of a girl, whose character is generalized and lost through reproduction. She re-inserts this image on contorted upholstered forms, analyzing the girl's identity as a pleasant pattern, like a flower or paisley print. In contrast, the upholstered furniture forms are dramatically personified, jarringly resembling confused human torsos and limbs, making a striking connection between our bodies and the objects upon which we rest.

Another artist interested in the stitchery on functional objects is **Karen Tam** (Montreal). Tam sews cobalt blue thread in the decorative style of Chinese blue and white porcelain ware into rice bags to recall issues concerned with industry, cultural product, representation and identity. Tam treats these bags like historical forms of media that circulated messages as well as product. The embroidered images on *The Canadian Pacific Railway: The Only Route Between the East and West*, lingers on Canadian propaganda, promises of integration and proliferation and ironically captures the optimism of 19th century Canadian industrialization and migration. In *The Royal Bird Call'd Foo hum*, Tam renders a rice bag assigned to a Montreal Chinese food store in the style of a Chinese take-out menu. In both works, Tam is interested in the hybridized fusions of Asian and Canadian cultures, and how traditional medias have impressed and defined contemporary pop cultures.

By considering the history tied in the practices of stitching, sewing, knotting and weaving, these artists are able to re-define their processes and pose new queries. All of the artists in this exhibition are *Thread--Bound*, using unassuming filaments to bundle influential ideas.

Guest Curator
Wendy Peart

¹ Parker, Rosika. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. Routledge: New York, 1989. p.6



June Jacobs, *Despite all Odds*, 100 h x 45 w x 16 d cm, Wool, yarn, stones, acrylic medium: hand felted. 2008



Martha Cole, *Clipped Cedar Hedge*, 44.5 cm x cm114.3 cm, Digital image on cotton, archival pigment-based inks, cotton, colored pencils, assorted threads, needlepunch polyester batting. 2008



Leanne Lloyd, *Mother, after Natalie Barney*, 50.8 x 63.5 cm, Digital print from 8 x 10 colour negative. 2010



Judy McNaughton, *Skins*, 254 x 15 x 20 cm, Sheep bone, sheep skin, crystal, photograph, thread, wood, brass. 2009