

C H A N G I N G

A R T I T U D E S

MUTTART PUBLIC ART GALLERY NEWSLETTER

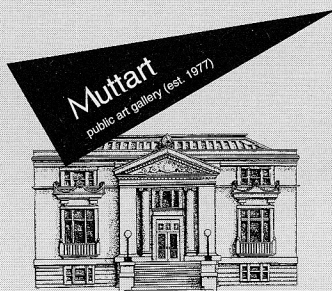


"Sky Woman Touched by Earth Stone"  
Pat Strakowki  
Alberta Fibrations exhibition

Fibre is a comfortable, familiar medium since it's used in various ways in everyday life - in the clothes we wear, the upholstery we sit on, the sheets and blankets we sleep under each night - our rugs, curtains, towels, tablecloths and so on. This general familiarity may have also been the reason for its slow rise in status as a valid aesthetic force. It has moved beyond techniques and sensuous materials by developing stronger conceptual trends.

Modern fibre has searched and found a place in today's technical world with the imaginative rediscovery of old methods, with new interpretations, and with the addition of nontraditional materials. Fibre has retained its image as a most sensuous art form, inviting tactile exploration. Freed from the need for utilitarian purposes, yarns and threads are now manipulated for artistic expression. Techniques remain as labour intensive as ever they were historically - that much remains mostly the same.

Handcrafts involving textiles and fibres have a lengthy, impressive history, eventually becoming associated with women's domestic arts. With the advent of the industrial age, such traditional handcrafts like weaving came to be done on power looms. Similarly, other textile methods like dyeing and screen printing became mechanized and entered the domain of mass production. A revival of hand-weaving in western society first occurred in England near the end of the 19th century as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris was the pivotal person who advocated a return to "handmade" and himself learned to weave, dye and embroider. Later, the artists of the Bauhaus era in continental Europe explored similar concerns. This same reverence for handmade objects eventually made its way to North America where the same missionary zeal regarded the machine as a corrupting influence while hand-processes were considered superior.



**Catherine Thrall**, from Lethbridge explores futuristic concerns in her imagery by using experimental methods which are interpreted in contemporary curved and linear shapes, creating a lively juxtaposition of the old and the new. In her work, aptly titled "*The Future Surfacing: Light Vibrations and Snap, Crackle & Pop*" she revels in an eclectic mix of media and technique.

**Barbara Pankratz** takes handmade paper to monumental proportions in her three-dimensional installation, titled "*Spirits of the Boreal*". Humanoid figures, masks and tree forms personify the role of silent protector of the wilderness for successive generations.

Artist **Jill Fischer's** recent works deal with the unlofty subject of "*Bugs*". Made of handmade paper with metal wire and found objects, these mixed media creatures appear to have a life of their own. This concept became even more appropriate after Fischer's recent battle with a serious illness. "My bugs are fascinating, creepy and tenacious to me," she says. "Hopefully others will also recognize their significance."

**Rae Hunter's** work is an interplay of the textures and colours of nature and is strongly influenced by her environment in the woods east of Edmonton near the Linbrook/Tofield area. She makes baskets using predominantly natural materials, but adds some unconventional materials such as snake-skin, copper wire, hide, bone, human hair. "I have chosen to explore the possibilities of the materials. The result is often a form bearing only a

tenuous relationship to the concept of a functional container". "*Synthesis*" and "*Metamorphosis*" are two such womb-like baskets.

**Lyn Phlueger's** work reflects her interests in archeological, cultural, and ethnic aspects of art objects and sees herself in historical perspective to the domestic piece "*Women's Work*". She works mostly in felts and adds embellishments through embroidery using thread or metal wire. She gives these traditional techniques a modern and much more personal interpretation, as in her piece titled "*Fly Away Girl*". Here, she reflects on motherhood as her own daughter is leaving the nest, touching a universal chord of love and loss.

**Barbara McCaffrey** from Bragg Creek is inspired by historical and cultural references which she explores through felting and papermaking. Her work plays with inside vs. outside, construction vs. destruction through ways of both covering and revealing. In "*Unearthed*" she presents the form of a vessel with a handmade paper core peeking mysteriously through layers of felt.

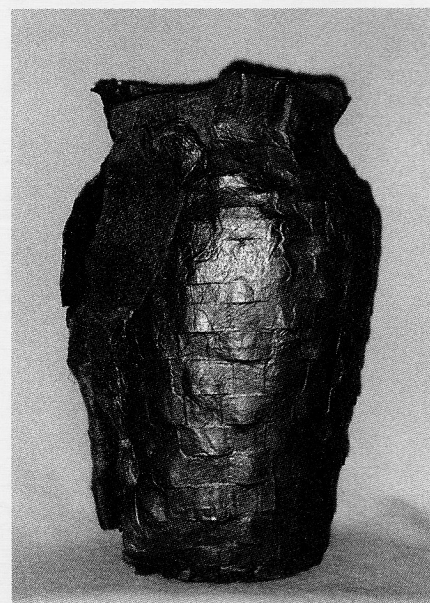
Calgary's **Pat Strakowski** features her sculptural works of paper maché, fabric collage and found objects. "*Sky Woman*" and "*Small Madonna Figure*" are examples of an inspirational trip to Mexico. She sees the Catholic Madonna figure in folk art as a non-intellectual object that symbolizes passion and fervent belief. Her concern is with interpreting the female form, not as an object of beauty, but as a "substantial woman - powerful and master of her own fate." Her art implies that we need

to explore, have fun and regain a sense of celebration.

**Mary Lou Riordon-Sello** and **Joan Caplan** have been doing collaborative installations around Calgary for several years. Using versions of such methods as crochet their approach has a definite feminist emphasis, using collaboration to foster a sense of community rather than authorship of an individual ego. In "*Party Line*" the physical properties of fibre are used to vibrate with women's voices. Fibre is presented as a link of communication throughout human history symbolizing comfort, protection and shared experiences.

The exhibition presents an exciting mix of well-established talent and the new, emerging artists still actively discovering themselves in this tactile medium.

### Curatorial Statement Elyse Eliot-Los



"Unearthed - Fragments of a Former Time"  
1995 Handmade Paper, Felt  
Barbara McCaffrey