

fibre focus

Volume 54 | Number 4 | Winter 2011

NEW WAVE OF FIBRE ARTISTS:
Exciting, Innovative, Vibrant – Canadian



Magazine of the Ontario Handweavers & Spinners

Xiaoqing Yan

Toronto, Ontario

Xiaoqing Yan is one of the most innovative fibre artists I have encountered while working on the *World of Threads Festival* interview series. Her beautiful work really stands out. Originally from Nanjing, China, she now lives in Toronto. She states, "The moving from China to North America has made a great impact on my life and my art as well. After living in Canada and the United States for several years, my soul is no longer all Chinese. In the best of times, I feel I belong to both the culture of my country of birth and to that of my country of adoption. In the worst of times, I belong to nowhere. I no longer wish to completely resolve the duality of my existence. Moreover, I have started to accept this "in-between space".

Xiaoqing works in a variety of media, not all of which is fibre. Her large-scale installations are particularly striking. One called *Bridge* involved hundreds of hanging ceramic spoons. This was exhibited along with *Cloudscape* (photo previous page) at the Phonix Art Gallery in Nanjing, China. *Cloudscape*, was

made from paper and natural reeds and was reinstalled again in 2011 for Toronto's Nuit Blanche at the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and Arts Centre. Xiaoqing states, "I work with a broad range of materials and techniques. Fibre is one of the materials I like to work with. It often relates to culture and tradition and the tactility and versatility help to produce unique artwork...for me, choosing the right material is like choosing the right work to express my thoughts. I use silk a lot in my works. Not only does silk speak about the tradition I came from, its transparency and delicacy also provides me the right effect for my ideas."

Like many of the artists featured in this article, she sees the surging interest in fibre arts as a response to technology. She says, "Now that modern technology has become so popular, it is great to see that many artists are still working directly with their hands and continue in traditional ways. Fibre artists... have the intimate connection between human body and materials. The skills

and materials involved were practiced, expressed and passed down through generations. The traditional craftsmanship relates to cultures and heritage."

Xiaoqing has a Master of Fine Arts from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A. She has exhibited in the Gladstone Hotel's exhibition *Come Up To My Room*, the 2009 *World of Threads Festival* in Oakville and has had shows at the Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant, Brantford, Artspace, Peterborough and IndexG Gallery in Toronto.

She says of her work, "I have become increasingly interested in cultural and personal identity and in the need to discover a new mode of artistic and social intercourse that blends Chinese and Western ways of thinking....In my art, every idea travels through the intricate passageway of how I think in Chinese, but speak in English. In an effort to shape myself, I take traditional Chinese materials and techniques and reinvent them within a Western aesthetic and presentation."

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Amanda McCavour

Toronto, Ontario

Many of the most interesting fibre artists today are pushing traditional sewing techniques away from wall hangings and out into the world as installation. Amanda McCavour has created a technically innovative approach that takes embroidery to a whole new level. She says, "I would describe my work as drawings that are made out of thread. I use a sewing machine and water soluble fabric to create thread drawings that can hold together without a base."

The results are remarkably detailed and lively scenes, such as her installation *Living Room* from the 2011 exhibition *Come Up To My Room* at the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto. The installation was based on an apartment where she used to live. She states, "I recreated many of the objects that existed in that space, chairs, side tables and other knickknacks out of thread and hung them from the ceiling

so that they were layered on top of one another, mimicking the space in my old home. Each of the objects were created on a 1:1 scale. The objects act as a trace or record of a space that used to exist. Part shrine or monument, the thread drawings act as tribute to a room that once was."

This bodily relationship to scale makes all the difference. Rather than trying to imitate painting like I see many fibre artists doing, Amanda has expanded the possibilities of her medium without being derivative. Her reconstructed rooms and objects are her most haunting and inspired work. Another piece called *Steam Pump* was completed while she was an artist in residence at the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture in Dawson City, Yukon. She transformed an old industrial object into a delicate thread structure. Amanda states, "The possibilities for fibre in contemporary

art are endless... Because fibre carries with it a certain history of use, I think that it is an interesting medium to talk about ideas of touch."

Amanda holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from York University and is represented by Lonsdale Gallery in Toronto. She has participated in international exhibitions and has recently completed residencies at Harbourfront Centre's Textile Studio in Toronto. She exhibited in the 2009 *World of Threads Festival* in Oakville and in *Hard Twist* at the Gladstone Hotel, Toronto. She has been in art fairs like Art Toronto, The Armory Show in New York and Art Chicago.

Amanda says, "I am interested in the vulnerability of thread in relation to the home, as both things feel temporary and fragile. I am interested in thread's ability to hold together and its strength."

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