





## suspending disbelief

With a theatrical hint of surrealism Amanda McCavour documents the world around her in 3D using only thread

Walking into Toronto's Lonsdale Gallery earlier this year, the wandering tourist or art aficionado would have encountered embroidered life-size images of hands disentangling thread affixed directly to the wall. Further on, under the gallery's skylight, a sea of multicoloured flowers was suspended from the ceiling, recreating the effect of a garden or small flowering prairie.

The visual effect of Amanda McCavour's work is hard to describe. She creates her 'thread drawings' using an old Singer sewing machine, stitching onto water-soluble material. She then immerses each finished piece into water, which dissolves the fabric leaving only the threaded design.

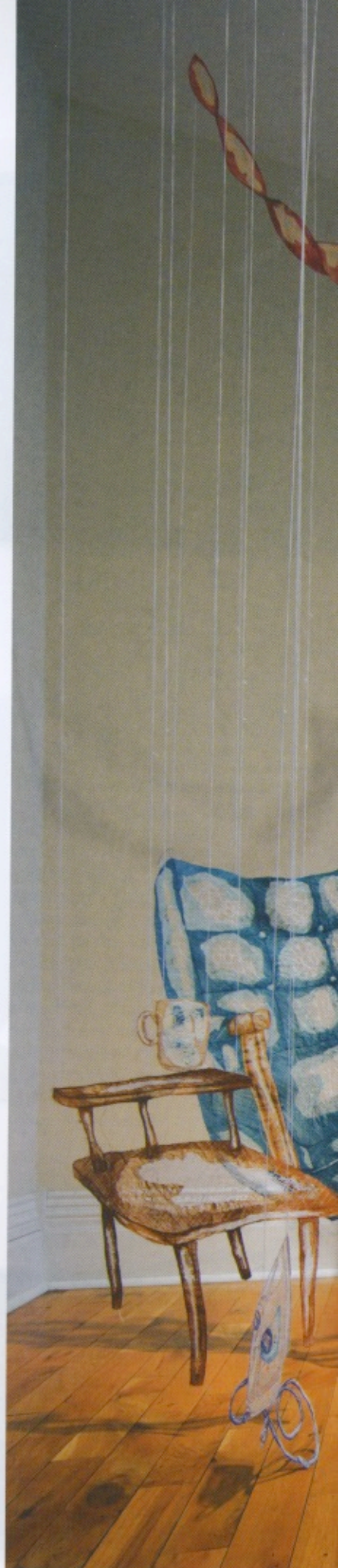
Embroidery is generally conceived of as an art that encompasses both the surface design and the material that it adorns and which serves as its backdrop. McCavour has destabilised this certainty: the embroidered motifs now having as sole support the thread itself or the rather more nebulous ubiquity of space.

The objects, people and abstract designs appear to float, evoking the ephemeral nature of art, things and – perhaps – life. However, if they could effectively be described as literally disembodied, the process of paring embroidery down to its most essential element also, albeit somewhat surprisingly, underscores the very materiality of both the thread itself and the scenes depicted.

I ask Lonsdale gallery manager Stanzie Tooth about this duality. Having spent much time with McCavour's work she responds: 'Throughout all of her series, Amanda shows the tenuousness of her subjects, their fragility and interconnectedness through the contrast of densely rendered embroidery to the airy openness of certain passages in the work', before adding, 'her floating thread drawings were a completely unique form that I had never seen before'.

The two themes on display in McCavour's recent exhibit – the human and the natural world –

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*Living Room*, 2010-2011  
Approx 3 x 3 x 3m. Thread and  
machine embroidery. Produced with the  
support of the Ontario Arts Council  
Photographer: Agata Piskunowicz





PHOTOGRAPHER: CHERYL RONDEAU



Top: *Floating Garden*, work in progress since 2011. Approx. 2.5 x 2.5 x 3m and increasing. Produced with the support of Ontario Arts Council, Surface Design Association and La Maison des Métiers D'Art de Québec

Above: *Birds in Flight*, 2009

Above right: *Stand In For Home* (detail) 2009-2010. Approx. 2.5 x 2.5 x 1.35m. Produced with the support of the Toronto Arts Council

Opposite: *Ice Box*, 2011, Approx. 3 x 3 x 3m. Produced with the support of the Ontario Arts Council

All thread and machine embroidery

traverse all her work, which displays an eclectic array of subject matter and styles. However a unity is created by two elements that underwrite all of the Canadian's art: an insatiable curiosity to document the world around her in multiple manners and a desire to explore the infinite possibilities of space, repetition and, most of all, line.

### Drawing the line

McCavour, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Toronto's York University, effectively sees her textile work as drawing. The turning point that led from privileging pen and paper to thread and needle (or rather sewing machine) occurred while still at art school. In a drawing class, when her then professor, artist Michael Davey, defined the art of drawing simply as line, McCavour suddenly understood the parallels between the graphic and textile arts.

Ever since, without looking back, she has been investigating the linear potential of thread. And her works

exhibit the same spectrum of visual possibilities as drawing – from minimalist and conceptual to figurative and realistic.

In recent years, the artist has produced a body of work premised on abstract pattern. *Ice Box* (2011) inspired by frost and snow crystal patterns belongs to this group. While the sober poetic work conveys the lightness of falling snowflakes, it possesses – like much of the artist's work – a tongue and cheek aspect in its inspiration, drawn not only from nature but also from childhood or seasonal craft activities and literature.

The same subversive humour is central to the well received installation McCavour produced for the Gladstone Hotel in 2010 as part of the Hard Twist textile festival. *Super-Spiro-Scribble Density Test* is made up of a plethora of round complex geometric designs that bring to mind the patterns underlying the physical world or microcosm but equally the visual aesthetic of





Spirograph, the popular children's drawing game invented by engineer Denys Fisher in the 1960s. The piece's playfulness and reference to doodling shouldn't mask its investigation of the formal properties of art. A veritable painting in three dimensions, the artist has maximized its aesthetic impact through the judicious and conscious arrangement of its elements. The

properties of line and thread, references to the world of nature, and the precarity intrinsic to both.

If McCavour's abstract work is both visually and conceptually effective, much of the artist's oeuvre is fully rooted in her skill in drawing. Some works are tour de forces of draughtsmanship, like those that have figurative, sometimes even narrative content.

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layering and juxtaposition of varying sizes and seemingly myriad motifs is theatrical. However, the gradation of colour within the piece's overall composition points to a hidden, more subtle and sensitive dimension to McCavour's art.

*Accumulate* brings the latter to the fore. The delicate strands of hanging flower or leaf-like forms harmoniously bring together many of the artist's concerns: the geometric and sculptural

*Untitled* is a particularly successful example. The scene depicting a precisely rendered full size woman immersed in countless and amorphous layers and strands of thread remains partly mysterious. The viewer nonetheless guesses that, like the hand and thread pieces, it comments on the historical bond between women and textiles, or textile-based arts and crafts and, therefore, possesses an autobiographical dimension.

PHOTOGRAPHER AGATA RSKUNOWSKA

