

THE TEXTILE ART MAGAZINE

embroidery

THE HEAVENLY
EMBROIDERY OF
**Michelle
Holmes**



UK £6.50



July August 2021



the sewing room



MAKING MAGIC

TORONTO BASED ARTIST AMANDA McCAVOUR CONJURES HER SPELLBINDING THREAD WORKS IN THE TINIEST OF SPACES

LIKE A MAGICIAN magicking a rabbit out of a hat, Amanda McCavour is a deft manipulator of space. As a maker of installations that literally fill galleries but created in a studio no bigger than a box room, she has to be. Pragmatic about the limitations of her studio, McCavour plans her installations – a mass of small individual elements, 'generally the size of my hand' – so that 'they pack up small'. Every table in her 10 x 14ft studio has a box underneath, hidden behind what McCavour refers to as 'strategically-placed aprons'. Born in Toronto, and raised just outside, McCavour did her degree there, followed by a three year residency. The latter, by giving her a ready-made craft community (she also met her partner, a jeweller, there), has grounded her in the city. But, like all cities, it has its challenges, a premium on space being one of them. McCavour is sanguine: 'I've designed these projects so that I can live in a city like Toronto.'

The studio, a three-minute walk from their loft apartment, is housed in an 'old for Toronto', red-brick, flat-fronted, multi-use building in an area of the city called The Junction, 'where all the city's train tracks meet'. Once a distinctly undesirable neighbourhood, it now has cachet, and there are lots of condos going up. What with the 'good shops', the 'cute parks' and the 'organic grocery store', McCavour evidently relishes it, as she does working among the other inhabitants in her studio building. 'I really like to hear people. There's a part of me that's a solitary maker but I also enjoy knowing that there are other people around who, like me, are working too.' There's the 'metal shop boys' who work just beneath her ('I'm right over the furnace, so it's hot!') who get 'loud and rowdy' in the shared kitchenette, her printmaker friend next door and the two little girls who live above, whom she hears running back and forth. There's an energy to the building but not the kind where you're expected to chat. It's the right kind of energy for me.'

And it's the first time she's had a studio door. 'There's something about being able to shut that door. It feels like my own world. It's private and intimate and I feel I can make mistakes in there or even do something weird.'

Like her partner, who has his studio there, McCavour used to work from home (a habit that she returned to during lockdown – 'to be safe'), on the kitchen table or at her desk in her six-foot-square designated work space. It was the machines that drove her out. She has three: two digital embroidery machines and an industrial sewing machine. With all the machines going, 'it was like a helicopter.' Now they're in the studio they drown out the rumble of the trains. 'There's something about the continual noise,' says McCavour. 'None are louder than a domestic machine but the digital one bleeps.' So she wears ear protection as well as listening to CBC news, music or a podcast, with *This American Life* being a favourite.

Confessing that she used to 'kill' her domestic machines by 'running-out' the motors, she talks in fond terms of her Juki industrial one, a purchase she procrastinated about making for years, while admitting that 'we fight'. The machines firmly ensconced in the studio, McCavour sometimes takes the 'quiet' work home, enjoying the conviviality of 'working next to someone'.

With 'any horizontal space being precious' (even her threads project from rods on the wall), meaningful, personal objects are at minimum in McCavour's studio. Nevertheless, two of her grandmother's framed drawings hang there – one a doodle she did while on the telephone, and the other a collage they did together when McCavour was six. Describing her grandmother as one of her first 'encouragers' and the person who taught her to sew, the drawings are dear to her; the collage in particular: 'I just remember feeling really proud of it. So it's a reminder really, when things are hard, making art can feel good.' 🧡
Ellen Bell

Amanda McCavour was a finalist in the 2020 Vlieseline Fine Art Textiles Award, on show at the Festival of Quilts 29 July-1 August.

amandamccavour.com