J. LYNN CAMPBELL

At the structural level my art is based on a relationship between symbol and process. What is essential to the notion of process is how the material can be shaped to evoke significance. Together, symbol and process provide a bridge to address a provocation of meaning. And, a symbol is a mark or sign that calls forth a perception of sentiment. Therefore, as archetypes, symbols can serve as perceptual links. The issue of the body/viewer as a medium of perception/sensation is the means that links the viewer to their experience of my art.

The content of my work has evolved from an experiential investigation of the internal/subjective space and the external environment - who we are and how we are in the world. And, as the creative process inevitably demands, the development of ideas challenged my use of materials and methodologies bringing about a transition from drawing, painting and collage to three-dimensional sculpture/construction and site-specific installation. The act of "building" made it possible to establish a relationship between symbols and space. As a result, several large-scale structures were realized that, for me, symbolized a building process through which the self could be experienced.

Further to this development, the focus on the external form shifted, situating the self further from the surface of the form to the inner nature of the form - that of the body. These constructions, cast and patterned from human forms both male and female, reintroduce the notion of meaning intricately associated with the substance of materials, particularly the material of the body. The body, or parts of, become symbolic and a material framework from which to view the world, and is a point of reference for all empirical knowledge. Our understanding of the world directly relates to how we experience and interact with it.

When fabricating work there is an aesthetic consideration - a conscious selection or claiming of elements for a particular purpose. But there is always more below the surface. The "making" by hand, the act of touching is also an act of intimacy. The chosen elements in combination with the process present a possible starting point to link other levels of understanding. For myself, the art making process is meditative and allows for the surfacing of empathy. The physical journey parallels or precipitates the spiritual journey.

When challenged by a changeable society and a frequently discordant global community, questions are raised concerning the integration of being. Is the body defined by the external cause to which we assign our feelings? Can we think of the body without extensions? What are the circumstances or conditions in which a person or community lives, works and develops, and how are these physical conditions viewed in relation to the possibility of life? These shifting realities characterize the human condition with all its complexities and variations. As a medium of perception/sensation the body/viewer has the potential of understanding questions about the truth of their existence within the space of the body.

These considerations are both a starting point and an ongoing deliberation in my art making practice.

J. Lynn Campbell © 2007

KIRTLEY JARVIS

The spark for **Home Show for the Homeless** was being introduced to a street-worn, unsteady and emaciated woman whose front teeth had been knocked out some time ago. I was out for a stroll with my daughter and my brand-new grandson. This startling woman had recognized Emily and come up to us, making a fuss over the baby. Em told me afterwards that she was also a new grandmother, my age and estranged from her family, blown apart by depression, drugs and alcohol. She once had a husband, children, a comfortable home. How does that come to an end? How is that possible?

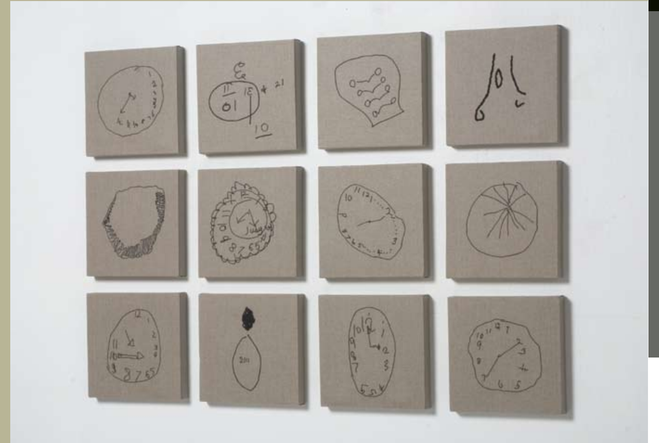
When I'm asked, "How long did it take you to make that?" – a good question if you have even a passing familiarity with hand embroidery – I usually answer "All my life". I don't count the hours I spend with a needle in hand and I see each piece as a sum of my life's experience. Becoming a grandmother and seeing my daughter raise her children, I see myself raising my children and my mother raising us – it is all stitched into this work.

Exploring and utilizing new digital print technology marks a new direction for my work, but also a return to formative influences such as William Morris, Mary Quant (who shredded notions such as "blue and green must never be seen") and Laura Ashley, whose decorating style has been described rather unkindly as "the bomb blast school." And, of course, Boussac whose fabric with dynamic geometric patterns was imported from France to the tiny basement shop, The Fabric Centre, run by Linda Lundstrom's mom in Cochenour, which neighboured the little northern Ontario gold mining town where I grew up.

The panhandlers' signs I've been buying at street corners for $5 are barely recognizable, almost invisible, as they are transformed into decorating motifs or assimilated into home furnishings. These slightly strange household artefacts remind us that our comfort is precarious. We are vulnerable as are the children who depend on us.

Some bad luck – an accident – illness – a few missed pay cheques - depression – schizophrenia – simply getting old. How close are we to being completely disenfranchised and disconnected?

Kirtley Jarvis



J. Lynn Campbell

J. Lynn Campbell is a Toronto-based artist educated at the Ontario College of Art, with independent studies in France, Open Studio Toronto, humanities at the University of Toronto, and philosophy at York University. Her practice extends from two-dimensional collage to three-dimensional construction and site-specific installation. She continues to explore various materials and methodologies emphasizing the working process – acknowledging material as both tactile imagery and subject matter. Based on strong symbolic references as a means of exploring the internal/subjective space and the external environment, her constructions query the complexities of the human condition. Since the early 1980s Campbell has exhibited in the Toronto area, Ontario regional galleries as well as Europe. Campbell was a member of Workscene Gallery/Artists Co-operative (1989-1993), Broadview Collective (BVW) (1992-2002), Red Head Gallery (2003-06), and is currently a member of the Tree Museum Collective, Toronto/Muskoka. Her work is included in private, public and corporate collections, and has found further support through the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

Kirtley Jarvis

Not having any patience with school curriculum, I am mainly self taught, except for studying part time briefly at Beal and for one year at the Sheridan School of Design in Mississauga. I seek out people - generally working away in solitude as I do - who know what I want to know. This year I was very fortunate to find print technician Dale Lackey at SCL Digital London who is one of those rare individuals more exacting than me when it comes to detail. Dale shares my giddy enthusiasm for experimenting with new materials and patiently encouraged my hands-on involvement in a whole new medium, whether moving pixels around, micro-managing colour or feeding voile into his large format digital printer. And he let me push the button, too!

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IN ABSENTIA
J. Lynn Campbell: situating the body
Kirtley Jarvis: Home Show for the Homeless
January 10 - February 24, 2008

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McINTOSH GALLERY
The University of Western Ontario

IN ABSENTIA

J. LYNN CAMPBELL
SITUATING THE BODY

KIRTLEY JARVIS
HOME SHOW FOR THE HOMELESS

JAN 10 - FEB 24, 2008

FOREWORD

This exhibition continues the McIntosh Gallery's signature format of partnering two artists in separate but related presentations around a particular theme of interest to the community. Through this combination, differing artistic viewpoints provide us with an opportunity to see a substantial body of an artist's work which together with the curatorial essays provoke considered reflection on specific issues. In Absentia brings together the outstanding work of London artist Kirtley Jarvis and Toronto artist J. Lynn Campbell to examine the impact of absence, both real and perceived, in our world.

I would like to thank the many individuals who have collaborated in the realization of this project:

- the artists J. Lynn Campbell and Kirtley Jarvis for their enthusiastic commitment
- contributing author Ivan Jurakic for his insightful essay
- Cambridge Galleries for the loan of work by J. Lynn Campbell
- the McIntosh Gallery staff especially Curator Catherine Elliot Shaw for her usual professional care in the organization of the exhibition and production of this document including her curatorial essay
- supporters of the McIntosh Gallery including the The University of Western Ontario, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, Foundation Western and the Gallery membership.

Arlene Kennedy
Director

IN ABSENTIA

Can there be another human experience more poignant than the sudden realization of loss or absence? Whether imminent or re-lived, it throws into high relief the gaping hole in the constellation of experiences unique to each of us. The want of personal relationship, physical ability or peace of mind, even if reversible, still bears the unbleachable stain of cumulative circumstance. Each of the works in this exhibition explores this phenomenon in quite different yet connected ways.

Though they have not met previously, there is a decided empathy between the practice of J. Lynn Campbell and Kirtley Jarvis. Each has constructed artworks based on her observation and introspection about the human condition in a discordant world. Their methods of combining materials in unexpected ways concurrently intrigue the viewer and encourage consideration of the interstices of meaning between them. Contrasting the handmade with the fabricated underscores their respective aesthetic qualities and attention to craft. The primacy of text stands as a central though different element for both; Lynn's single words or simple sentences function as meditative stations while Kirtley's telegram-like signs and lists convey their maker's underlying pain. All of these works occupy the precarious space between public presentation and private introspection where ultimately we all reside.

IMAGES

cover top: *Passage* (1988-1990) Bass wood, Danish oil, wax 244 cm x 106 cm x 61 cm Photo: Jean-Michel Komarnicki

cover bottom: *THE LAST SUPPER* (2007) Hand-embroidered hospital gown 111.8 x 81.3 cm Photo: William Kuryluk

double image panel top: *Treaty* (1995) 20 black folding chairs, fabric, embroidered text (installation) Photo: Gary Mulcahey

double image panel bottom: *CLOCK FACES (2007) Hand-embroidered linen canvas Each: 25.4 x 25.4 x 3.8 cm* Photo: William Kuryluk

Top Row: Jake / B. / Clock / Bill
Second Row: Mary / Christopher / Kim / John H.
Third Row: E. R. 12 Sept. 1916 / Daniel Age 7 / Neale / Matthew T.

The Veiled Vibrations of J. Lynn Campbell Essay: *Model (No. 1)* (2001) Stainless steel wire fabric 150 mesh/.0026 wire diameter, 34-gauge stainless steel wire, 20-gauge steel wire 107 cm x 38 cm x 30.5 cm Photo: Gary Mulcahey

Home Show for the Homeless Essay: *PLEASE HELP* (2007) 3 printed voile banners, dowels Each: 243.8 x 30.5 cm Photo: William Kuryluk

THE VEILED VIBRATIONS OF J. LYNN CAMPBELL

After several years of encountering J. Lynn Campbell's sculpture, I am convinced that her exhibitions should come with a warning label, something like:

Viewers are advised that this artwork demands active engagement and may cause subtle alterations in future thought patterns.

The engagement begins even as one approaches the object. Regardless of its size, complexity or materials, each piece seems to radiate a palpable aura, a silent but seductive invitation to venture nearer. Once inside its forcefield, we are confronted by the real power of the work, its singular ability to invoke the presence of human absence.

Lynn is quite clear about the important relationship between process and symbol in her work. One is inextricably bound to and supported by the other and ultimately results in a self-referential experience for both artist and viewer. Her choice of materials is carefully considered as the core framework on which to hang the desired information. Equally important is the high level of technical skill implicit in every detail as a means of drawing the viewer into prolonged consideration/meditation. Recognizing the inherently human curiosity with other beings, her consistent use of the figure, either in specific or implied embodiment, provides us with, initially at least, a comfortable starting point.

In *Passage*, for example, we encounter a construction whose interlocking basswood strips form a diagonal pattern around the outline of a human form. We can project ourselves into the portal and beyond it but the identification of a familiar object is at once unsettled by the jagged edges of the wooden lattice. Imbedded in their threat is the concretized atmosphere of the figure's concomitant thoughts and feelings. In a multi-layered allegory for life itself, after the figure has passed through, all that remains is a mélange of intersecting experiences incarcerated in a barrier between the past and present.

Similarly, *Treaty* allows us a way inside, its organic spiral beckoning us to participate in the conversation between the adjoining chairs. Then we confront the embroidered texts on each seat which individually and collectively provoke questions about personal and social realities in a diverse and changing world. Can we continue to impose overarching "*value(s)*" on ourselves and on those around us and expect a world in accord? Can "*ethics ethnic ethnography ethnology ethnomethodology ethology ethos etiquette*" reside equitably together? The title and configuration of this work suggest a marked absence of honorable discussion toward mutually-acceptable resolutions, that the questions and their answers are in constant whirling negotiation.

Stillness is another meditative opportunity. The three lines inscribed on black granite require the viewer to slow down and mull over the letters in order to arrive at the intended word. The block seems to hover above the floor yet also intimates a grave-like entrance into a soundless world below. Its material, as the product of timeless motion and compression, references the symbiotic nature of opposing forces found in nature. It also speaks of the profound silence when one is alone, whether by choice or situation, and surrounded by the absence of human contact.

With the *Model Series*, the artist concentrates our attention on the physicality of the human form. No longer a negative space, the body is still seemingly captured in ephemeral material, light and air quite visible through the sinuous metallic fabric. Like anatomical drawings in space, they are defined through no apparent support apart from the tension of the sutured planes. Despite the implied motion, the emptiness inside this tracery speaks of an internal absence of self, waiting to be replenished or perhaps damned forever to remain void of any real content. Without identifying facial features, they appear anonymous and universal but close examination of their proportions and attributes reveal specific individuality making this barren interior all the more tragic. At the same time, their beautiful surface evokes the fashionable coverings which both mask and display the superficial.

The correlating *Extension(s) Series* expands this idea by focusing on detailed augmentations of the body. Visualizing them on our own bodies conjures images of exotic fantasy, imaginative role-play or perhaps prosthetic coverings. They hang from implied store display hardware, like props to pull out of wardrobe as needed to project the required image for that day or situation. Does their sensuous spectacle effectively conceal or highlight the underlying faults? The wearer and the viewer both negotiate in their own way with what is absent in the perception.

Through her sculpture, J. Lynn Campbell makes us question the truth of our experience, of our past which is comprised of myriad small sensations. She invests her work with a distinctive combination of personal aesthetic, arresting technique, and haunting sensibility such that each object subtly vibrates in our most intimate core. As Marcel Proust observed in *Remembrance of Things Past*, in that vibration resides the key to understanding:

The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.

Catherine Elliot Shaw
McIntosh Gallery Curator

HOME SHOW FOR THE HOMELESS

Kirtley Jarvis' artwork is grounded in the quotidian, a world of hastily written notes and scraps of collected information. The kinds of offhand messages that busy people tend to overlook or acknowledge only fleetingly. These often crudely handwritten admonitions are the vernacular shorthand that the artist uses to create paeans to everyday tragedies. In reproducing what often amount to rudimentary scribbles, Jarvis reveals her empathy for underachievers, social misfits, and in recent work, the homeless. Alternating between hand embroidery and wire armature, in her modest way, the artist preserves these otherwise ephemeral documents and reveals her affection for the very human foibles that these transient manuscripts capture.

Based on the adaptive reuse of everyday objects, Jarvis freely recycles both texts and objects as artist materials. Whereas, most assemblage tends towards transforming found items into mytho-poetic objects, Jarvis uses grocery lists, phone messages and personal notations to ground her artmaking in discrete personal narratives. Several of the artworks including *Wired* and *Clock Faces*, remain largely autobiographical, referring to Jarvis' family and work experience. *The Last Supper* for example, features the menu of her father-in-law's last hospital meal embroidered onto a ubiquitous patient gown. Sadness, failure and loss are a constant theme in the work.

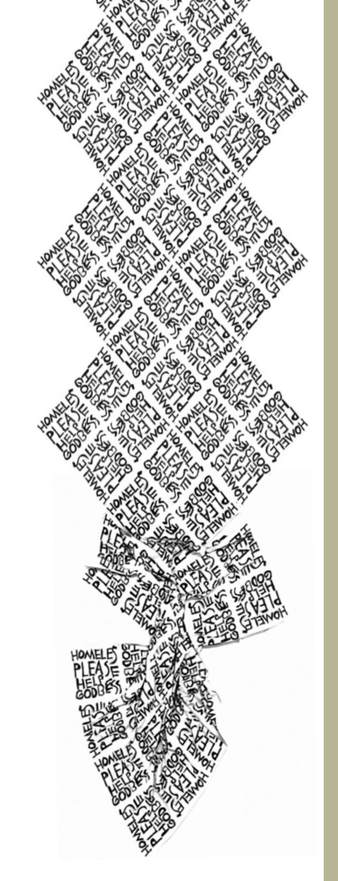
However, many of Jarvis' contributions to this exhibition step outside of personal experience to address the misfortune of others. Upon entering the exhibition space one passes through *Please Help* a set of printed banners, made up of the words **Homeles Please Help God Bless**, repeated over and over as a graphic motif. Creating a veiled entry to her exhibition, the artist transforms this plaintive plea into a mantra.

Continuing on the theme of homelessness, Jarvis recontextualizes the writing of anonymous street people and panhandlers, transferring their words onto a series of familiar objects, including the respective texts from *Traviling* and *Mistake*.

Traviling
Homeless
Hungry
Please
Help
Thank You

Made A Mistake,
Want to Go Home,
Spare Change To
Get There
God Bless

Both texts have been hand embroidered into the cushions that sit atop footstools. Taken out of context, either might be mistaken for an expanded Haiku, but the plain language, crude script and misspelling make it hard not to feel some sympathy for whoever wrote these words. Embroidering the text onto a footstool, an innocuous place to rest one's weary feet, Jarvis adds gravity to the plight of the absent authors. The words trigger our empathy.



In *Menu*, a piece that awkwardly relates to *The Last Supper*, the artist achieves a similar effect by superimposing **Homeless + Hungry Will Work For Food Or $$$** on a red restaurant menu brimming with dining selections. If the message appears heavy-handed, it is also a sly attempt to speak on behalf of those who suffer real hunger among us.

Autographs features two complementary texts **I had a triple by-pass...Please help so I can buy my pills. Thank-you. Cyril** and **Won't refuse food. Chris** embroidered into a souvenir autograph book. Ironically, each piece is signed by its respective author. All of the original writing was purchased by Jarvis directly from people on the street. The artist took time to explain her work and paid each person $5.00 for their otherwise disposable placards. Some, like Cyril and Chris, were so curious about the project they insisted on signing their work.

Each piece gives voice to those who are often all but invisible in our increasingly cloistered communities, reminding us of the politically motivated cutbacks to social services, and the fact that municipalities are increasingly prone to legislating policies that criminalize poverty. Jarvis' work implies the presence of homelessness, abuse and mental illness in our communities by addressing its invisibility, its absence. But this absence is difficult to quantify, and the cruel truth is that despite our best intentions we are unlikely to act on the message. Conversely, what Jarvis' quietly confrontational artworks succeed in doing is making us aware of our own privilege, and just how vulnerable that privilege can be.

How often do we stop and consider our social or financial vulnerability? How secure are our jobs? How much debt can we manage? What happens if we develop a serious long term illness or a form of mental illness? Is our future, let alone our children's secure? What means are in place to protect us in an increasingly market driven economy where the social safety net has been downsized?

Jarvis' art mirrors these concerns and she is keenly aware of her own vulnerability as a working artist and a woman. In her artist statement she notes: "Some bad luck – an accident – illness – a few missed pay cheques – depression – schizophrenia – simply getting old. How close are we to being completely disenfranchised and disconnected?" There is of course no easy answer, and her decision to address this provocative issue strikes a troubling chord.

Ivan Jurakic
(Ivan Jurakic is a visual artist, writer and Curator at Cambridge Galleries. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario.)