



## BARBARA TODD : COLOUR PLAY

WAYS OF SEEING, SQUARED

Text by Edwin Janzen

Sometimes you look, and then see. And sometimes you may need to decide what you see. Dividing her time between Montreal and Troy, New York, artist Barbara Todd is attentive to the scenes she encounters in her travels, photographing them and selecting from each a minimalist palette of just two colours. A jacket's red and a barn's brown, for example, or the blue and black of an airport baggage cart.

These chromatic pairs she reinvests into two-dimensional sewn fabric works, including a number of small, ten-inch-square pieces, some of which have served as studies for larger, quilted works also shown here. Besides the colour pairs, Todd's work thus also comprises a second juxtaposition: a pairing of archives—Todd's collected photographs with her substantial store of fabrics.

Todd has also created some smaller, seven-inch-square pieces, which combine multiple fabric and paper colours in squares, rectangles, diamonds and stripes, recalling symbolic systems like heraldic arms, semaphore flags, or playing cards. In truth, there is no such system here; yet, in their variety the squares create the impression of a visual language—like alphabetic characters, perhaps, consistent only in combination with one another.

Small wonder we call alphabetic letters “characters”; for doesn't every letter possess a kind of characteristic “voicet,” a truncated

utterance meaningful only in relation to the others, as together they form choruses of words, sentences, paragraphs? But here, amidst Todd's particolour chorus, there is also ambivalence. The works invite comparisons with household cloths and linens yet elude such readings in the same moment. “We are not pot holders,” the little squares might be inclined to correct us.

They have a point—yet in a curious contrast, there's no doubt that Todd's large, quilted works are, indeed, quilts. The largest features two vertically oriented halves, one deep blue, one black. Another is similarly halved in red and dark burgundy-brown, while a third features a pin-striped, black rectangle surrounded on three sides by a larger blue square.

With the taciturn confidence of seated elders who know well that both size and tradition are on their side, these quilted pieces preside over the gallery as though they decided long ago to be here—courteously sending the artist an invitation, no doubt. Where the small squares form an aggregate of uncrackable code, of promised meaning, it is as though the quilts left the school of signification behind years ago. They are graduates, well past that hardscrabble place where irritable, put-upon works of art must strive to speak, to “mean” something. They have arrived at an easier, securer place. Maybe, a day at a time, we will too.

## BARBARA TODD : CURRICULUM VITÆ

NÉE À CAMBRIDGE (ON) EN 1952 / BORN IN CAMBRIDGE, ON, IN 1952

### Education

1975 Honours B.A. (Fine Art), University of Guelph, ON

### Expositions individuelles (sélection) / Selected Solo Exhibitions

2015 *Colour Play*, Art Mûr, Montreal, QC  
 2012 *Teaching a stone to talk*, The Tom Thomson Gallery, Owen Sound, ON  
 2012 *Côte à côte / Side by Side*, Art Mûr, Montreal, QC  
 2008 *Stone Days*, Art Mûr, Montréal, QC  
 2007 *Stone Days*, Web Launch and Exhibit, Oboro New Media Lab, Montréal, QC  
 2003 *du ciel*, Conseil des arts textiles, Art Mûr, Montréal, QC  
 2003 *Skin*, Estevan, National Exhibition Centre, SK  
 2000 *Heaven and Earth*, McClure Gallery, Montréal, QC  
 1999 *Œuvres récentes*, Galerie Lilian Rodriguez, Montréal, QC  
 1998 *Installation of Quilts and Drawings*, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, ON

### Expositions collectives (sélection) / Selected Group Exhibitions

2012 *Dreamland*, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, ON  
 2012 *Disparaître*, Diagonale, Montréal, QC  
 2012 *Friend of a Friend*, Thompson Giroux Gallery, Chatham, NY  
 2012 *Grey Matters*, Albany International Airport, Albany, NY  
 2010 *Femmes artistes. L'éclatement des frontières, 1965-2000*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, QC  
 2010 *The Imaged Word*, Albany International Airport, NY  
 2009 *Hudson Mohawk Regional*, Albany University Gallery, Albany, NY  
 2009 *The Space Between: Barbara Todd and John Yost*, The Arts Center, Saratoga Springs, NY  
 2009 *Textile Art in Canada*, Montréal Centre for Contemporary Textiles, Montréal, QC  
 2009 *Global Warming: Scenes from a Planet under Pressure*, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, QC  
 2008 *Hudson Mohawk Regional*, Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY  
 2006 *Hand Face Body*, Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, ON  
 2005 *Moral Fibre: Engaged Works in Textile Media*, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, NS

2004 *Space Invaders*, The Arts Center of the Capital Region, Troy, NY  
 2004 *High Points: Selections from the Collection of Contemporary Canadian Art*, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, QC  
 2004 *Celan*, Dazibao, Montréal, QC  
 2003 *Artists Against the Occupation*, MAI Centre, Montréal, QC  
 2002 *New York après New York*, Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland  
 2002 *Au clair de lune*, Art Mûr, Montréal, QC

### Intégration des arts à l'architecture / Public Commissions

2008 *Jardin de guérison*, Sacred Heart Hospital, Montréal, QC  
 2001 *Herbier*, Foyer Châteauguay, QC  
 2001 *Les Phases de la lune*, Gouin Courthouse, Montréal, QC

### Collections

Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal  
 Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec  
 The Canada Council Art Bank  
 Vancouver Art Gallery  
 The Mackenzie Gallery  
 The Surrey Art Gallery  
 The Winnipeg Art Gallery  
 Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau  
 Federation of the Combined Jewish Appeal  
 Macdonald Stewart Art Center  
 The Alberta Art Foundation  
 The Banff Centre for the Arts  
 Grant McEwan Community College  
 The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies  
 The Library and Gallery