

Galerie Diagonale - Ying Gao:Walking City/Indice de l'indifférence



The **CATQ** (Conseil des Arts Textiles du Québec or the Council of Textile Arts in Québec) began as a disciplinary provincial Council. In 2002, after 23 years of existence, the Council changed its formation and its mandate, and in 2004 they renamed themselves as the artist center Diagonale. Professional artists living in Québec who work in fibre techniques, materials and/or concepts are invited to apply to join the juried organization, which currently has 80 members. Their mandate encourages reflection upon the ever-changing definition of fiber art, while providing a forum for emerging artists at the Bachelors and Masters levels, and for those artists who are more established in their careers. Each year they present six juried exhibitions which are chosen several years in advance by an appointed Selection Committee. For many years, it was necessary for the Council's exhibitions to be held in other venues, however, in the fall of 2004, they opened Galerie Diagonale. This space houses one of the few gallery spaces dedicated to exhibiting fibre art in North America, and provides artist resources, such as a documentation center of artist members, as well as office space for the staff that run the centre.

Diagonale is committed to showcasing art work from other countries and cultures, as well as disseminating the work of Québécois and Canadian fibre artists to other national and international locales. In 1997, the CATQ developed a prize for emerging undergraduate students in the fibres discipline, selecting one student from the University of Québec at Montréal, the University of Laval and Concordia University to take part in a group exhibition held the following year. Last year's winners were Amélie Brisson-Darveau from UQAM, Cynthia Coulombe-Bégin and Karine Turcot from the University of Laval, and Julie Simoneau from Concordia University. The 2006-2007 exhibitions also included: *Résistance*, a show which highlighted BFA fibre graduates from Concordia University; *Flutura et Besnik Haxhillarie* in a couple of Albanian origin who have made their home in Montréal; and *Walking City – Indice de l'indifférence* by Ying Gao, which is reviewed in this issue of *Fibre Quarterly*. Espace sur mesure,

Information about Diagonale, as well as members profiles, may be found on their website, which is available at: <http://www.artdiagonale.org/>

Ying Gao:Walking City/Indice de l'indifférence by Ed Janzen

Diagonale, Montréal, Québec

May 28 to June 9, 2007



Walking City, 2007, Medium: mixed, Size: 1.3m x 0.7 cm

Let us shut the door on our closets stocked with those clothes we deploy to reaffirm our certainties. With *Walking City/Indice de l'indifférence*, Montreal artist Ying Gao opens the door into a more troubling space, an inverted wardrobe in which it's the garments that make demands of us.

Three dresses rendered with a great many folds, plaits and flourishes — all in purest white. It's like a wedding, a world in white, perfect, exquisite — a vision of wholeness and promise. Or is this a little too convenient? Won't we permit our thoughts to leave western-civilization's orbit and its fantasies of whiteness and purity for just a moment?

Come closer, and the sudden hiss of air announces the inflation of a sleeve. Clap your hands and an origami-like ornament expands and contracts like a breathing thing (an "organism"?). These interactive dresses, strangely off-balance, cryptic and idiosyncratic, depart from the traditional wedding dress, subverting the purity of white. The wedding dress's comfortable symmetry is dislodged in favour of something more ambivalent. Whiteness, after all, can mean many things. In certain societies white signifies mourning. White can evoke purity — but equally it can, like a shroud, sequester us from the corruption it hides. These animated dresses, sensitive to our very presence in the room — are they imbued with the breath of life ... or the hiss-rattle of death? They speak to us, but they give away little. There is indeed interaction, here — but we remain alone, uneasy.

A collection of remarkable white shirts, some of them no more than arrays of narrow, white, vertical fabric strips, hang silently suspended in two rows on either side of the whispering dresses. There is something subliminally masculine about these shirts. Could it be the semiotic detritus of Hollywood lingering in our heads, calling to mind

Sylvester Stallone or Steven Seagal, the bellicose white action hero's battered, bloody chest draped in the slashed ribbons of some durable-but-not-durable-enough combatant's shirt? Under what other circumstances would anyone wear such impractical garments as these?



absence, 2007, Medium: cotton organdie, Size: 1m x 0.6 m

Yet the shirts' meticulous positioning evinces ritual, preparation — not rough-and-tumble. Central here, perhaps, is a rendering of adversity, incompleteness, and inadequacy as something sublime. Completeness, here designed and crafted out of existence, is concomitantly, paradoxically reaffirmed. This is a funerary white invoking mourning, solemnity, but not common sadness. The complete man accepts the circumstances of his life without regret. His proper attire will not be accidentally lacerated by a series of misadventures in some deadly gauntlet; how much better to craft a shirt that in its very design evokes laceration of the spirit?

Though Walking City/Indice de l'indifférence is two separate pieces, their juxtaposition lends the total exhibition a gravity generally experienced in larger halls than Diagonale's modest space. Beyond meanings or interpretations of the individual works, there is a deeper field, in which a sublime, universal order engenders tension and memory, and supersedes reason and argument. We could call this ceremony.

Photo information:

I Title: Walking City/ 3 dresses, Year: 2007, Medium: mixed, Size: 1.3m x 0.7 cm

Photo Credit: ying gao

2. Title: Absence, Year: 2007, Medium: cotton organdie, Size: 1m x 0.6 m

Photo Credit: ying gao

You may find more on ying goa and watch "inflatable dresses" and other video clips of her work in action, on-line at this blog

<http://cavaaller.blogspot.com/>

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