



### ***Can Craft? Craft Can National Exhibition***

Art Gallery of Burlington, 19 August – 29 October 2017

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*Kathy Kranias*

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The *Can Craft? Craft Can!* national exhibition in the Lee-Chin Family Gallery at the Art Gallery of Burlington presented some of the key issues in debates about craft. Part of the cultural celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary, the inaugural biennial exhibition aimed to critically examine contemporary Canadian craft through the themes of materiality, sustainability, and identity.

Presenting a breadth of new works by sixty-four artists, designers, and craftspeople from the provinces and territories, the exhibition contained

objects of use and contemplation including jewellery, furniture, textiles, pottery, and sculpture. Made from new and traditional materials, the objects clearly addressed issues of hand skill, material, and labour.

Historical contextualization provided by Gloria Hickey in her catalogue essay examined how conceptualism created a vacuum in the 1960s and 1970s, allowing for materially-based practices to thrive. The exhibition certainly foregrounded the specificity of materials and processes in the conceptual aspects of the contemporary works it presented. Exemplified in masterworks such as Ruth Scheuing's tapestry, *When Ada Meets Penelope and Other Weavers in Cyberspace* (2017), Gord Peteran's *Early Painting* (2017), and Barbara Tipton's *Adrift in Jetsam* (2017), the objects embodied concepts generated through advanced hand skills and

material interests. Significantly, some of the works engaged digital processes, including rapid prototyping, employed to support the primary exploration of material and its histories.

Issues around sustainability could be seen in *Mend and Make Well* (2017) by Jessica Vellenga and *Vitreous Marker* (2017) by Brigitte Catchpole, but were more obscure in other works. The connections between cultural practice and biodiversity, ecology, anti-consumerism, and social justice theorized in Amy Gogarty's catalogue essay would have benefited viewers with the employment of didactic panels.

Individual and collective identities were expressed in an inclusive range of practices by Inuit, First Nations, settler, and artists of colour dealing with personal and collective histories. A monumental tapestry by Elisapee Ishulutaq and Kawtysie Kakee of the

Pangnirtung community weaving studio titled *Winter Game* expressed Inuit cultural identity through imagery and the cooperative process of textile production. A glass sculpture by Northern Ontario artist Cheryl Wilson Smith, *Promises and Lies: An Immigration Story* (2017), explored her sixth-generation family history through the immigration narratives of her ancestors.

Eschewing the white cube exhibition aesthetic by attending to the materiality of craft, the curators of *Can Craft? Craft Can!* embraced a vernacular craft show set-up in the tight juxtaposition of vitrines, tables, and floating walls. Even the ceiling was employed to hang chandeliers and a ceramic installation. Indeed, the Curatorial Advisory Committee led by Denis Longchamps asserted craft's history and defining materiality in their presentation of the contemporary.













