

# The continuing thread

By **ROBIN SARAFINCHAN**

"THE CONTINUING Thread", running at the Eye Level Gallery from January 7th to the 25th, is an exhibition which examines the relationship between textiles and their use within a fine art tradition.

Five artists have collaborated to create this display: Ruth Scheuing, Leslie Sampson, Barbara Luxton, Vita Plume and Ann MacGillivray. Although all have lived and worked in Nova Scotia at one time, they come from very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Together they bring varied historical traditions and references to their work. Each is interested in the particular potential for textiles to communication and in the individual and personal relation everyone has with cloth. The many decorative and functional traditions of cloth are explored through the works in this exhibition.

This show attempts to dispel the mistaken notion that today's textiles have no symbolic or recognizable content. Everyday textiles do contain very specific messages about such factors as monetary value, function, occupation, sex, and age.

One example is Leslie Sampson's re-examination of the tradition of cross-stitch embroidery samplers. Sampson's work "is a reappraisal of embroidery's service to ruling class ideology, especially the use of sampler verses," she says in an artist's statement. "Traditionally the embroidered text promoted abstract ideals of femininity for women (which

were often at odds with their actual life experience) or put all emphasis on the afterlife. The quotations chosen are imbued with an active voice of resistance. They point to social issues and realities in the here and now. The voices are the women's so often silenced by history, by intimidation, ghettoization or by our own willful forgetting. These words break through this suppression. They are militant observations that challenge and refute the generalizations and stereotypes of a cultural heritage that is not theirs."

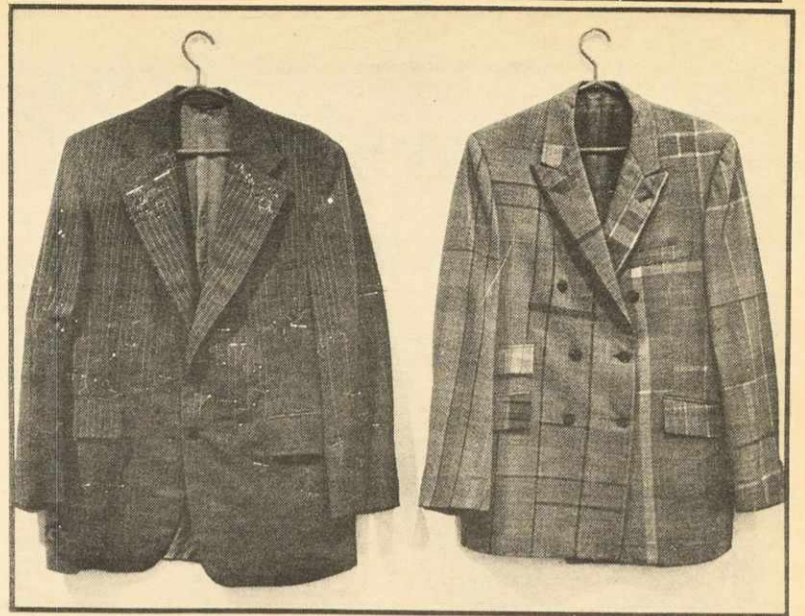
Samplers have a long tradition. Once symbols of the virtue of subservient domestic labour, they demonstrated the quality of the maker's handiwork. Sampson, in her contemporary samplers, has interjected a critical voice that asserts a new position for women and female culture.

Ruth Scheuing alters men's suits to illustrate certain points. Scheuing, in a statement, says her main interest in this is "to show options for changing existing structures. I see myself as an artist working in the traditions of textiles. This is how the varying aspects of function and use have

become important issues in my work. Generally a work in fiber is proportionally more valued with its decreasing apparent practical use. 'Use' is seen as a multi-faceted ability of textiles to affect space, to keep warm, to give comfort (both physically and symbolically), to be decoration, to serve as non-verbal communication. Weaving to me is an abstract system similar to music where themes and their variations can be explored within a given structure."

There will be a free public lecture at the Gallery on Thursday, January 16, in conjunction with "The Continuing Thread" exhibition. Titled "Underpinnings," it is being given by local historian Heather Dawkins. The talk will examine the issues and questions surrounding the craft versus art debate in the context of the tradition of textiles.

The Eye Level Gallery is a non-profit artists' centre and receives funding from the Canada Council and the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness. It is located at 1585 Barrington Street and is open Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 5 p.m.



These works are an example of the textiles on exhibit at the Eye Level Gallery through January 25th. These altered men's suit jackets are by Ruth Scheuing and are entitled (l. to r.) 'Pinstripe with Pins' and 'Plaid.' Photo by Bill Jansen of Dal Photo

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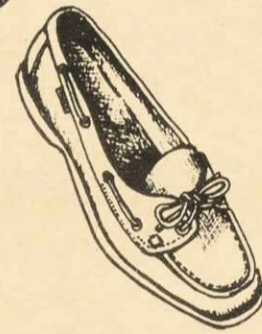
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