

'Fibrations': close, but no cigar

by Pat Murphy

Fibrations, a new generation of fibre art in Alberta, currently on display at the Students' Union Art Gallery, testifies to the growing importance of 'fibre' as an art form.

Traditionally treated as a domestic practice, related to decorative art and "women's work", *Fibrations* represents an attempt to transcend the common biases surrounding textile work. Compiled over an eleven month period, the juried exhibit contains twenty-five works by Alberta residents and was produced by Alberta Culture as part of the provinces' 75th anniversary celebrations.

The bulk of the show reveals a similarity in approach that is shared by most of the pieces it contains. Given the fact that the submissions were judged partly on their potential to demonstrate the integration of textiles into the mainstream of "art", the common concerns exhibited by the works in the exhibit become glaringly apparent.

Traditional technique dominates the show. Natural dyes, hand-weaving and spinning, hand-made paper, and an overall absence of advanced textile technology are evident. While all of this may represent contemporary notions of quality, it certainly says little for originality and diversity, doing even less to advance fibre as a medium.

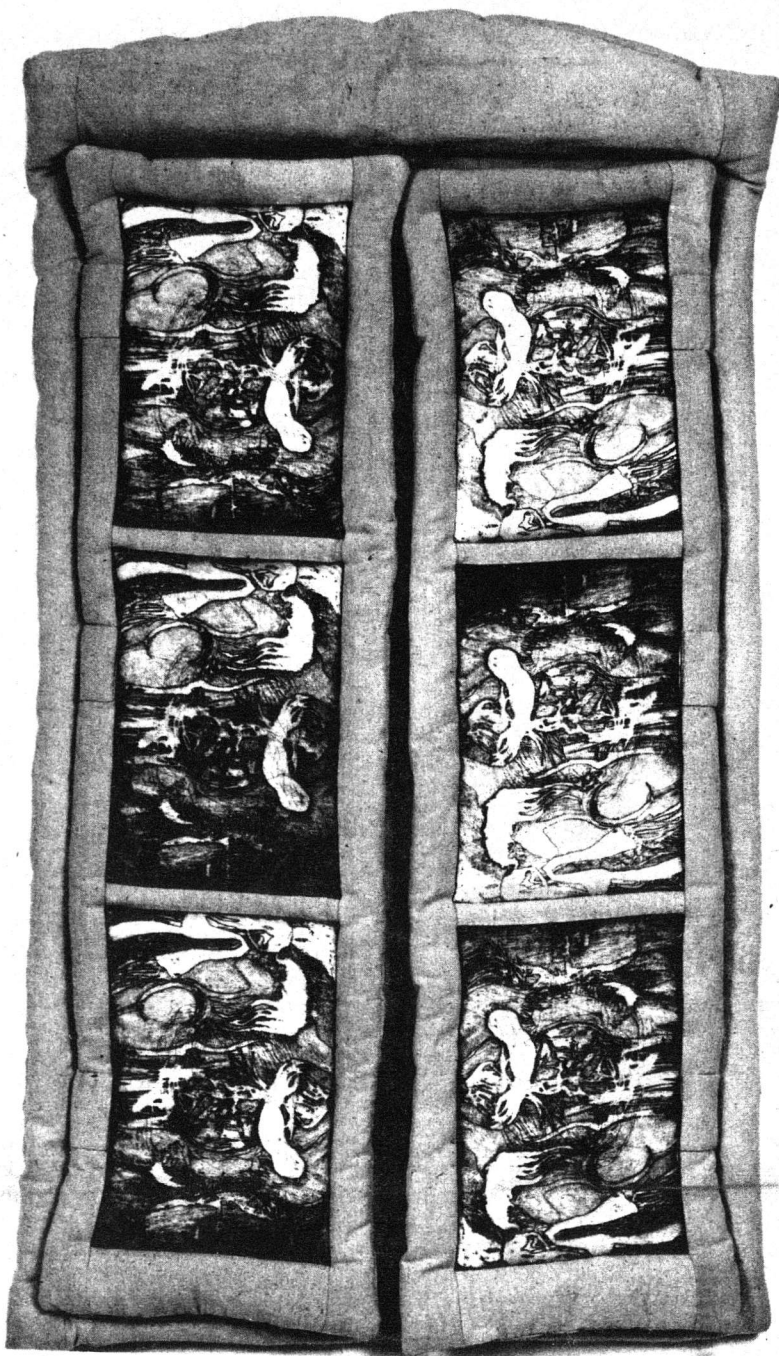
Fibrations is a self-conscious and "timid" collection of works by (we must assume) some of this province's finest fibre artists. Generally, few of the pieces take full advantage of the versatility and dexterity of fibre, limiting self-expression to a traditional definition of the medium.

Luckily, there are some exceptions. Perhaps the most innovative entries are those displaying sculptural qualities: Sandra Tivy's *Mask for Keeping Secrets*; or Lylian Klimek's *Ancient Dreams*. Tivy's piece is primitivistic, similar to a shaman's mask or a figure on a totem. Klimek's *Dreams* is influenced by certain architectural concepts, as is evident in its layered, pyramid structure.

Of the more traditionally conceived pieces, Katherine Dickerson's double weave *Spring Plow* and Trudy Lovegrove's knitted shawl (from hand-spun yarn) retain the capacity to function as statements of the future.

Fibrations contains far fewer functional items, such as clothing or furnishings, than expected. Billed as an exhibit that "draws on our past, reflecting the present, and reaching out to the future", *Fibrations* cost the provincial government just over \$35,000.00 to produce. If the show is taken solely as a representation of the social climate of Alberta, it falls flat. Most of the pieces lack individuality and emotion, at least insofar as technique is concerned. Overwhelmingly, women dominate the show. This is a collection of works in a medium that is generally seen as an area of female endeavour, and given the current status of women in Alberta, one wonders if fibre will ever achieve a "high-art" profile.

A juror, writing in the catalogue of the exhibit, lamented the artists' apparent lack of an independence of conviction. Now, what would Judy Chicago say?



Pat Strakowski's *In Memory of Sam from a Window of a House that no longer Exists*; 26" by 46"; Intaglio on satin, quilting assemblage.

Wendy Black's *Rainbow of a Different Contour*; 66" by 26"; English and Italian quilting.

Confusion blurs Young's latest

by Michael Dennis Skeet

Hawks & Doves
Neil Young
(Reprise XHS 2297)

Neil Young is a confusing and schizophrenic artist. For some bizarre reason, he seems to feel compelled to follow every sound, creative album with a bit of total drudge (perhaps this is only his way of highlighting his own work). *After the Goldrush* was followed by *Harvest*, and *Comes a Time* is followed by *Hawks & Doves* (Reprise XHS 2297).

I am not a close follower of Young's work, but by any standards (leaving aside the standard he himself set with *Comes a Time*), this new album is a turkey. A particularly nasty observer might suggest that *Hawks & Doves* is a cynical

attempt by Young to cash in on the current C & W mini-boom. I myself prefer to believe that Neil has simply been in California too long. He's suffering from terminal ennui ('mellow' for you Children of the '70s).

If this were a demo prepared by Neil Young, novice performer (and one acquaintance maintains that the sound quality suggests a demo), the kid would never get a contract. I'm astounded by the vapidness of many-most-of the lyrics, and the music is far too repetitive to stand by itself.

Side 1 is plodding, slow and incredibly sentimentalized. Two of the songs, *Little Wing* and *The Old Homestead*, date from that wonderfully creative period, the mid-70s. It's easy to see why they haven't been recorded before now.

The tempo picks up a bit on side 2, and, if there's a highlight at all on this album, this is it. *Comin' Apart at Every Nail* is probably the most complete of the nine songs included, and *Stayin' Power* at least has a jaunty, Texas-Playboys-type swing that appeals. On the other hand, though, is *Union Man* - Neil Young doing Mellow Electric Woody Guthrie. If, as it has been suggested, Young is presenting a deliberately sophomoric tune in order to satirize collectivism, he certainly succeeds. The operative word here, though, is sophomoric.

Even die-hard Neil Young fans should be ashamed of *Hawks & Doves*. In a way, this album is characteristic of Young's adopted homeland - rambling, weak and unsure of where it's going.

Hotter Than July
Stevie Wonder
(TAMLA T373)

There ought to be a movement afoot to have Stevie Wonder canonized. Despite the relative lack of success of his last album, Stevie just keeps pluggin' away. *Hotter Than July* is certainly no *Songs in the Key of Life*; in fact, it may not even be as good as *Fullfillingness' First Finale*. The rhythmic playfulness that characterizes Wonder's best music is fully evident on *Hotter Than July*.

As *Sir Duke* was the high point of *Songs in the Key of Life*, so *Hotter Than July* is keyed by a tribute to another great man - the late Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. It's Stevie's intention, so the liner notes tell us, to attempt to have the civil rights leader's birthday (January 15)

declared a national holiday in the U.S. *Happy Birthday* is no miserable mourning of King's untimely death, though - it pulsates with the riotous joy of life that is one the King's most enjoyable legacies.

As I said at the start of this interview, someone should be doing some sort of thing for Stevie Wonder. Here is a man, seemingly completely at peace with himself, who is telling us through his music that humankind does have some points in its favor. Would that more people were listening.

ALSO NOTED:

Echo and the Bunnymen *Crocodiles* (Sire BUN1) Whoopee! First, England brought you the Mod revival. Next, it was Ska coming back from the past. And today's latest nostalgia kick? Psychedelic Rock, of course! You knew it was only a matter of time! *Crocodiles* is not a blatant rip-off, nor is it a heavy-metal clone. Echo and the boys (who win this week's Bonzo Cracker Award for the greatest group name) give just a suggestion of the Jefferson Airplane from the *Volunteers* era, while remaining distinctly British. This is a little weird, and not for all tastes. What next? Ian Drury singing *Help Me Rhonda*? Monty Python - *Contractual Obligation Album* (Charisma CA1-2216).

Hard-core Python fans beware. This sucker really was put together to meet contractual obligation, and most of the material sounds as if it was thrown together the night before the assignment was due. Apparently this is the first time the Pythoners actually sat down to prepare material specifically for a record album. I eagerly await their next movie.

