

canada and money: themes in ainger furniture

by Miriam Bernath

Very often we go through life not noticing the things around us. One of the things you may or may not have noticed is that slowly but surely, the Ainger Cafe, located in Atkinson College, has been getting new furniture. The furniture is made by York fine arts graduate Ruth Arnold who is currently employed by the York University libraries.

Following renovations to the cafe last year, Arnold approached the management with an offer to make new furniture to replace the older, rickety stuff.

Arnold said she "had always wanted to work in wood during her undergraduate years, but was allergic to it." After graduation, she began to make small pieces of jewellery, which allowed her to work with the material while conserving both her health and work space. As for inspiration, she said, "it often comes from the shapes of the woods themselves." In the case of the Ainger furniture, she began her work with the floor boards that were torn up in the renovations.

The next Ainger project she did was a series of stools; there are 16 to date. They are traditional four-

legged and made of oak and ash with ebony dowels. Arnold said, "They're very sturdy, and I expect that they'll be around long after me." The later ones are larger and have more elaborate carvings. In keeping with the theme of Calumet College, there are peace signs on many of the stools.

Other designs include a series of stools with seats in the shape of coins. Arnold said she was inspired by a series of events. "People kept asking me if I was making any money doing this project," but although she wasn't, she felt it was "teaching [her] a lot about being business-like." At the same time, a friend gave her a tree which beavers had cut down near her summer cottage.

These symbolic events, combined with her "mental searches" for things both round and distinctly Canadian, led to the creation of her series of "penny" chairs. The chairs also have struts in the guise of abaci and signs on the sides with various puns on the theme of money. Arnold said she likes to use words in her pieces, "because although not everyone is able to draw or paint, most people are able to read," making her art that much more accessible.

Although few would know it, Arnold also includes visual puns



André Souroujon

Themes of money grace the seating space in the Ainger Cafe, courtesy of artist Ruth Arnold.

in her work. In the "tulip table," inlays in the shape of tulips adorn the top, while more tulips and fronds grace the legs.

Another of Arnold's themes is recycling. The inlays on some of the tables are made with the

ebony dust of other projects, mixed with epoxy. One of the most playful and interesting uses of recycling is the "Frankenstein" chair. It was built of bits of wood left over from some of her other projects, as well as bits and pieces

"robbed" from neighbourhood trash cans. Arnold says "The Bride of Frankenstein" is almost ready.

So next time you decide to dine at the Ainger, don't take your seat for granted.

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