

WORLD of Threads

BY LORI ZIMMERMAN



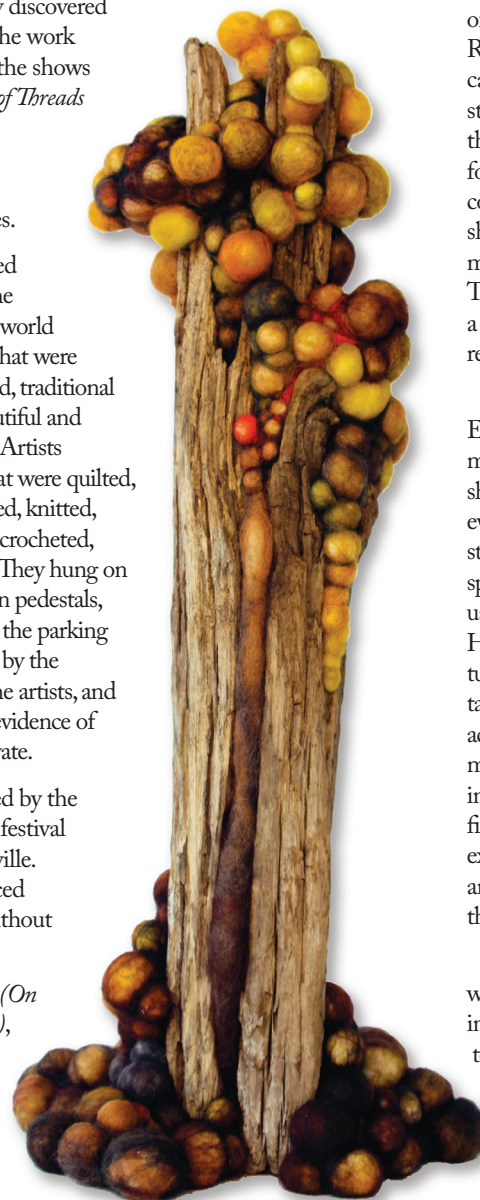
IT WAS THREE YEARS IN THE MAKING: a labor of love, and it showed. The November *World of Threads Festival*, which showcased the work of nearly two hundred fiber artists from twelve countries and eight Canadian provinces organized into twenty-one exhibitions, took place in Toronto and its neighboring community, Oakville. It was a visual feast.

The curated exhibitions were based on an international call for submissions. Unlike many contemporary fiber exhibition calls, the curators did not request work that addressed a specific theme. Instead they discovered themes evident in the work submitted. Half of the shows were official *World of Threads* exhibitions and the remaining shows were created by independent entities.

The festival offered an overview of all the contemporary fiber world has to offer: works that were colorful and subdued, traditional and innovative, beautiful and thought provoking. Artists submitted pieces that were quilted, woven, felted, hooked, knitted, embroidered, laced, crocheted, collaged, and more. They hung on the walls, perched on pedestals, and beckoned from the parking lot. I was impressed by the thoughtfulness of the artists, and the overwhelming evidence of their desire to innovate.

I was most moved by the works in the major festival exhibitions in Oakville. Here artists embraced experimentation without sacrificing quality.

De rerum natura (*On the Nature of Things*), at the Joshua Creek Heritage Art Center in Oakville, dealt



with themes of nature, plants, and animals. Curator Gareth Bate

observed that nature is a dominant theme in contemporary fiber art. Many of these works used saturated color, patterning, and organic forms. The exhibition's title references an ancient Roman poem by Lucretius, who believed in the atomization of nature long before there were microscopes.

At the Gallery at Queen Elisabeth Park Community and Cultural Center, *Quiet Zone* focused on the softer side of nature. As curator Dawne Rudman noted, "Neutral shades can also be elegant, alluring, and strong, deserving recognition in their own right." Artists chosen for this show employed muted colors, everything from dusky, shadowy grays and charcoals to milky whites and creamy tans. This soft palette, combined with a richness of subtle texturing, revealed a fragile delicate world.

The halls of the Queen Elisabeth Center held two more exhibitions. *Myth Making* showcased three pieces that evoked archetypes and ancient storytelling. *Variegated Threads* spoke to the variety of materials used by contemporary fiber artists. Here were works made of PVC tubing, aircraft cable, industrial tape, swamp reed, and wire, in addition to traditional textile materials. The festival brochure indicated that these pieces didn't fit into the themes of other exhibitions, but were too exciting and unique to miss. And, indeed they were.

The *World of Threads Festival*, which began as a single exhibition in Oakville in 1994, has grown to its current multi-venue form through the dedication of volunteers Dawne Rudman (Festival Chair and Curator)



and Gareth Bate (Festival Curator). The involvement of international artists, the inclusion of experimental work, and the passion of the curators came together to create a unique window into the fiber world. I look forward to future *World of Threads Festivals*. To stay in touch with *World of Threads* visit www.worldofthreadsfestival.com and sign up for their artist interviews.

Lori Zimmerman is a fiber artist working in the Los Angeles area. Her work incorporates fabric painting, photography, freestyle hand embroidery and collage. Her blog at lorizimmerman.com/lori-zimmermans-blog continues her exploration of contemporary fiber art. Her artwork can be seen at www.lorizimmerman.com

FAR LEFT: Ixchel Suarez (Designer and Master Weaver), **Memories of a Birch Tree**; 2011; wool, linen, cotton, synthetic fibre, metallic yarns, ribbon, raffia, silk, bamboo; assistant weavers: Stella Tang and Yamile Roa; 4 m x 1.50 m.
NEAR LEFT: Jodi Colella, **Marrow**; 2011; wool, found driftwood; needle felting; 22 x 8 x 6".
TOP RIGHT: **View of Quiet Zone**, Queen Elizabeth Community Center, Oakville, Ontario, Canada.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Nathan Johns, **Windy Waters**; 2012; polyethylene tubing, fishing line, colored water; loom weave; 24 x 15 x 3"

