

Beyond the Studio

Fibre people are multi-faceted and full of ideas, some of which are not directly related to weaving and spinning. This column focuses on the many other interesting pursuits weavers and spinners follow in their daily lives. If you know of someone who pursues other interests, send an e-mail to Graham McCracken at ffpublisher@bell.net and he will follow up and tell us about it.



Photo by Graham McCracken

Joe Lewis: Holding the Torch High

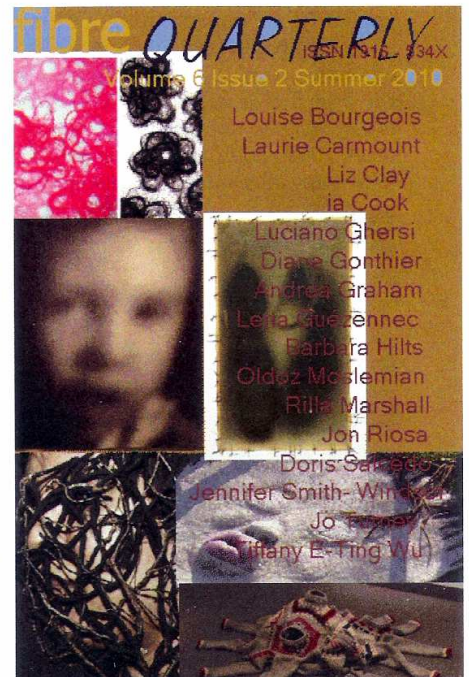
BY GRAHAM MCCRACKEN

*To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.* – John McCrae, 1915

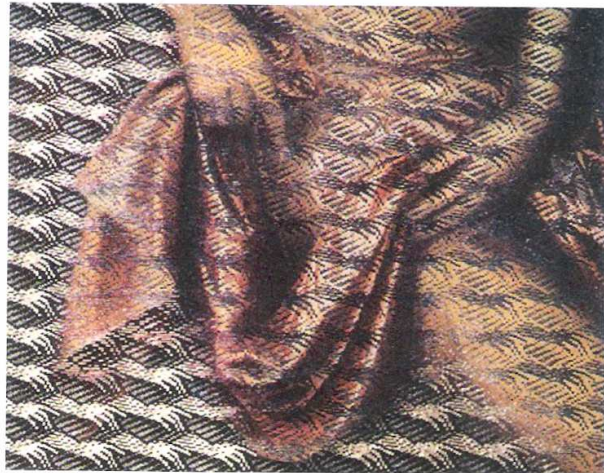
IN A WORLD where the creation of textiles has quickly passed from a necessary family activity to one most people have no connection to short of making a trip to the mall, Joe Lewis has picked up the torch and is carrying it high in *fibreQUARTERLY*, an online e-zine that focuses attention on the textile world in Canada.

Joe Lewis grew up in Paris, Ontario and moved to Toronto after high school. Getting bored with working in restaurants, he went to Trent University for a year then moved on to Peterborough and Ottawa before returning to Toronto. Along the way, he volunteered and worked for theatre companies and art galleries in public relations, developing a knack for writing quickly about upcoming events. Back in Toronto he wrote some articles for newsletters and different communities. Eventually he discovered *Surface Journal* which was the in-house magazine for the Textile Artists and Designers Association. This was a black-and-white newsletter similar to early editions of the *OHS Bulletin*, although colour images were available online.

Joe wrote some articles for *Surface Journal*, but, "I also volunteered as the electronic newsletter guy," he told me. "In 2005 they decided to stop existing as an organisation. At that point they were the only publication in Canada that was looking at textile work in a wide range from weaving to surface design to felting, and I thought that it was an inappropriate thing to do, to stop publishing." So Joe decided to soldier on. "I had a mailing list, I had the computer know-how,



fibreQUARTERLY Cover - Summer 2010



Lia Cook – Point of Touch: Bathsheba, 1995, Pressed linen, rayon, oils and dyes, 46" x 51" (117 cm x 130 cm) Collection of the Oakland Museum of Art, California

so I put out a newsletter and simply switched to become *fi-breQUARTERLY* online magazine." At the time there were a few magazines that occasionally covered textiles, but not in depth and most, like *Fibre Focus* and *The Canadian Quilter* were in-house magazines not readily available to the public. "So I thought there must be a way of combining all this type of writing in one setting and to focus on what is going on in Canada, what has happened in Canada, our past, the education system – how textiles are taught in schools – and I went from there."

Initially, he sent out invitations, contacted different organisations and schools, introduced himself and what he was doing, and extended an invitation to read *fibre Quarterly*. By incorporating information about local fairs and quilt shows, along with in-depth articles on all aspects of textiles, word spread bringing his total subscriptions over the past five years up to 700 people. He now makes use of *Facebook* to announce new issues, making it possible to reach 7000 people instantaneously, although he has no idea how many of them view the magazine. Despite deliberately focussing on Canadian content, he has been surprised that his readership is largely international.

He regularly goes to openings. He documents things and puts up albums on *Facebook* of what he has done each week. "I put up an agenda on my blog. Then I go out to the events, put some images up on *Facebook* and connect it back to the blog. If there is a bigger story it can move from the *Facebook* album to the blog or if it is timely, become a story for the magazine." He occasionally uses *Twitter* to alert followers to a particular show or event that he thinks is really special. Use of the Internet has permitted timely reporting of these events, and also has facilitated the use of more in-depth articles with larger im-



Joe Lewis - at work

ages not previously possible in *Surface Journal*.

In his first editions, Joe included biographies of people who had made a unique contribution to textiles in Canada. One included a grandmother who was in the forefront of introducing knitting machines as a tool for designers to create samples. He put together a bibliography of articles she had written or were written about her, added personal stories and a profile from the woman's granddaughter. He also included articles on someone with an exhibit at the Textile Museum, profiles on contemporary artists, and a look at different galleries and museums that were showing textiles. In addition he began showcasing up-and-coming graduate students from Sheridan College, providing a venue for students to spotlight their work in pictures and in words. Joe considers *fibreQUARTERLY* as a good entry point for the market.

fibreQUARTERLY has evolved since its inception in 2005 and Joe now will accept international submissions as long as they maintain a certain Canadian focus. A current article highlights a European show. "There was a felt exhibition in Italy at the beginning of May called Climate Change and three of the artists in it were Canadian. One of them was a recent Sheridan grad whose work is phenomenal. I was happy that they had got this show, and that they had already

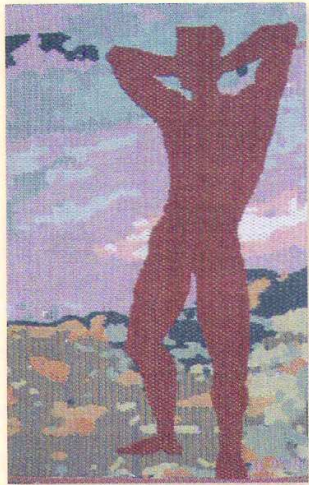


Created by Diane Gonthier for the European touring exhibition "The Climate is Changing" 2010-2012

reached this level. For a student to suddenly be in an international show happens a lot, but for the curator and the jurors to already know their work is amazing."

Getting others to write for the e-zine is a bit more problematic. Joe receives submissions and asks for articles, but finds it is largely frustrating at times trying to get people to write. He blames post-secondary education with its emphasis on studio practise. "You're not learning about the history of it; you are not learning about how to write about it or how to think about it. If you do, it is very aligned with current contemporary practises which is very theoretical based to the point where actually knowing how to make textiles from fibre somehow doesn't seem to matter anymore." On top of that, there are fewer and fewer places to learn how to make textiles. "There are places to learn to weave (for ex-

Joe Lewis is a landscape artist who switched to weaving on a Jacquard loom. Beginning with weaving coloured photographs, he moved on to using pictures of his landscape paintings to provide elaborate settings for his new weaving. Developed over a period of 12 years, Joe's work, along with fellow Jacquard artist, Kathy Schicker, was highlighted in an exhibition entitled *Telling Tales: Narrative Woven Textiles at Berkeley Castle Gallery in Toronto* this past April.



MudFlap Boy, handwoven on Jacquard loom by Joe Lewis

This exhibit has now gone online and can be viewed at the poplar gallery online:

<http://poplar.mackenziefrere.com>.

Read an account of Joe's venture into Jacquard weaving on the new OHS website:

<http://www.ohs.on.ca/members/fibre-focus-magazine>

ample), but it's becoming extremely limited, and you only get to a certain point. When the community college system started, most of them had textile programmes because they were training people to go into the textile industry. Very quickly, way ahead of the wave, they noticed that the textile industries were dying in North America, so they have switched over to an art curriculum where the concept of printing meant a one-off. This idea meant production weaving of scarves rather than yardage. It became object oriented as opposed to...well, yardage."

From an art or craft perspective, Joe sees *fibreQUARTERLY* as an opportunity for people to write about textiles. "It's almost an open forum concept," he said. "What is really interesting, is because certain schools encourage their students, I am actually getting academic papers to publish as well as articles."

The importance of *fibreQUARTERLY* in promoting the world of Canadian textiles in Canada and to the rest of the world can not be understated. When *Surface Journal* fell from failing hands, Joe Lewis was there to catch the torch and hold it up high as *fibreQUARTERLY*. As a result, his online magazine acts like a beacon in the darkness to spotlight Canadian textile ventures.

fibreQUARTERLY can be viewed at:
www.velvethighway.com

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