

Made to fit by Cate McQuaid, Boston Globe, August 13, 2010-08-13

Only one of the 19 artists in "Fabrications" works small. This smart show is the second exhibition Cynthia-Reeves Projects has mounted in a former wool mill along the Sugar River here, and the 18,000-square-foot space provides plenty of room for large-scale art.

Not Angela Hennessy's "Midnight Disease," a series of 15-inch-by-12-inch drawings made with unraveled black velvet, hairnets, and thread. You have to come close to see the curlicues and snarls, and the shadows they cast. It's nearly as intimate as brushing hard tangles out of someone's hair. Contrast that relationship to gawking at objects that dwarf you. Hennessy often works with black velvet, conscious of its references to luxury, sensuality, and labor. These delicate, dark works recall lace, netting, and obstinate knots. Because of their size, it's easy to overlook them. Don't. They have a quiet, insinuating power that is best not ignored.

Thematically, "Fabrications" builds on the site's history: The show focuses on textiles and the wider concept of fabricating. That second idea can be applied to just about any work of art, but Cynthia Reeves, an art dealer who owns Cynthia-Reeves, a New York gallery, and Spheris Gallery, in Hanover, N.H., has put together an impressive, cohesive show with an eclectic roster of artists, some local, some of national and international stature.

Jaehyo Lee fits the last category. His "Leaf Curtain" evokes both fabric and forest. Two curtains of leaves lined like beads on strings hang side by side. Walk between them, and the aroma takes you to the woods in October. His untitled wall sculpture resembles two enormous pompoms made from dried sticks; hanging side by side, they could be a couple of dandelions gone to seed, or two eyes bugging out.

Another curtain, **Anne Lindberg's** "*old brain 2*," made of 500 pounds of dark rayon thread draped from a steel beam, begs to be touched. The threads fall like heavy silk across your fingers. The title refers to the old est, most primal part of the human brain. The work conveys sensuality; at the same time its opacity suggests fear, and its sheer weight and the fall of it carry a sense of inevitability.

Other pieces delve into the industrial history of textiles. Danielle Julian Norton's installation, "Translating Change," seems tailor-made for the old wool mill. Two giant spools of thread rotate, pulling a single strand through several screen boxes and open space, hooking around pulleys, traveling up, down, and around.

Over the course of the exhibit, the 170,000 feet of thread will transfer from one spool to the other. The piece's rigging fits hand-in-glove with the pipes and beams that line the ceiling; there's a sense of fine work being cranked out, bit by bit, on a large scale. Farther down the gallery hangs "Twine," Jan Staller's bustling photo of a more contemporary textile: dozens of spools of Tyvek thread, suspended in different directions. Tyvek is a synthetic material in which fibers are bonded by heat and pressure. It makes a startling contrast to the slow turn of Norton's single thread.

Yet more thread shows up in Claire Watkins's magical yet utterly scientific "Flock of Needles." Watkins employs rotating magnets to move needles, which are tethered to the wall with red thread. The needles rise, fall, and sway, like styluses drawn through space. The movement is subtle, and you need to linger to appreciate the fanciful dance of needle and thread installation, "S.S. VT. Vapor," a billowing, suspended piece that from a distance resembles several parachutes or clouds. Pass beneath it, and you'll see it's not made of silken fabric, but plastic cups stuffed into chain-link fencing. A string hangs from each cup, and several tie together in hanks that drift downward. The recycled cups and fencing are materials with weighted history; who would expect trash to be so buoyant? Nearby, Michele Brody goes in a more organic direction with her "Grass Skirt Extra Large," a nylon organza cone the size of a big Christmas tree, illuminated from within. The fabric has pockets in which Brody has planted grass seeds, which have sprouted and grow as the gallery staff waters the sculpture.

Johnny Swing gets the prize for burliest sculpture. His ropy metal piece, "The Big Seed," sprawls and coils across 70 feet of the gallery (and still, in all that space, it does not overpower any of the other art). It has tentacles that rise up and end in glowing light bulbs. It sports a horn, and a propeller. The piece looks half sea creature, half shipwreck.

Many of the art works in "Fabrications" aren't nearly as big as "The Big Seed." Indeed, some, such as Muriel Stockdale's witty handcrafted flags conflating the stars and stripes with textile traditions from Ireland to China to Zaire, are neither big nor small, but ordinarily scaled. But Stockdale's several flags hang in a parade down a long aisle through the middle of the gallery. Half the fun of "Fabrications" is the space Reeves had to work with. The other half is that she has a canny eye for engaging art.